

JAN -5 1959

B 750211

THE LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS
SERIAL RECORDS

JAN 16 1959

The Literary Review

Gil Orlovitz

Autobiography, Poems, GRAY: a Play

Five Stories

Varieties of Childhood Experience

QUARTERLY / ONE DOLLAR / WINTER 1958-1959

Editorial Notes

The Literary Review salutes The Academy of American Poets on the occasion of its Silver Anniversary, to be celebrated throughout 1959.

The usefulness of academies, societies, and similar institutions dedicated to the advancement of artists and the arts is frequently challenged, occasionally with vehemence. Some years back we received a letter from a friend, himself a poet of stature, who takes this dim view:

"In open confession, I have had to believe that poetry organizations are by definition anti-poetry. . . . I must believe that nothing meaningful to the life of poetry can meet, elect officers, hold dinners, and dispense back-yard prestige in the terms of any poetry organization I have ever seen. I think, moreover, that such activities in such terms (a) confuse the issue and (b) leave a natural opening for the natural aggressiveness of the mediocre."

To this cosmic generalization we dissent. Even as we admit that some cultural associations fall short of their proclaimed lofty purposes and, in so doing, perpetuate and encourage mediocrity, pretense, false conceptions and standards of art, we incline, on balance, to the view that however limited their efforts, whenever two or more persons are gathered together in the name of art seriously to foster its worth, some good must follow. Bach, Beethoven and Brahms may not have needed a cheering section, but it is safe to say that the hundreds of choral societies and orchestras, the thousands of performers, either amateur or second-rate professionals, and the innumerable music societies that flourished in their times provided an atmosphere congenial to their spirits and stimulating to their work.

There is no record that Horace, Virgil, and their lesser contemporaries felt affront that Maecenas provided grants-in-aid and sponsored group activities to further their well-being and status. Even earlier, the Periclean playwrights appear to have found encouragement from benefactors who provided prizes and other assists that made possible the production of their immortal plays on the sunny slopes of the Acropolis. . . .

The Academy of American Poets was founded on November 7, 1934, by Joseph Auslander, his Pulitzer Prize-winning wife, Audrey Wurdemann, Ridgely Torrence, Charles Hanson Towne, and Marie Bullock—all dedicated spirits. Marie Bullock, born in Paris and reared mainly in Europe, had recently returned as a young woman to the United States only to learn with dismay of the average American's indifference to and neglect of poets—an attitude quite the reverse of the one she had known abroad. From that day forward she became a person with a mission—to help, through the Academy, to make the poet's voice heard in the United States; more specifically, in the words of its Charter, "to encourage, stimulate and foster the production of American poetry by providing fellowships for poets of proven merit and by granting scholarships, awards and prizes for poetic achievement . . ." Along with this tremendous purpose was the equally fond hope of the founders to educate the American public to the value of poetry.

Almost immediately the Academy announced its intention to award \$5,000 Fellowships to America's most worthy poets. What temerity!—the Academy had

(continue inside back cover)

s
y
s
g.
d
es
e
of
at
a
y,
ne
ne
n-
er-
or
ng
tic
re-
nd
he
ry.
an-
ooo
hy
ad

N
fr
B
h
h
N
h
B
L

l,
at
d
r
ne
e
rs
at
ir
of

as
py
e-
n,
e,
ts.
ed
ed
res
ge
of
he
hat
a
ny,
the
the
in-
er-
for
ong
etic
re-
and
the
ary.
an-
ooo
thy
had

Contributors

VIRGINIA CHASE, West Hartford, Connecticut, has published three novels (two of them recommendations of the Book-of-the-Month Club) and contributed stories and articles to leading magazines: *Atlantic Monthly*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Commonweal*.

AUGUST DERLETH, Sauk City, Wisconsin, has recently published two more novels, *The House on the Mound* and *The Moon Tenders* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce), his eighty-third and eighty-fourth book respectively.

EUSTACE DURRETT, Louisville, Kentucky—one of the founders of *Views* magazine and currently its editor—has published in several magazines.

YAAKOV DAVID KAMZON (1879—) was born in Lithuania, lived in Palestine for a number of years, and now resides in South Africa. Because most of his poems are dedicated to Jerusalem, he is known as the "Poet of Jerusalem" (*Meshorer Yerushalaim*).

FREDERICK R. KARL's story in this Number of *The Literary Review* is his first published story. An instructor in English at City College, New York, his articles on contemporary literature have appeared in several quarterlies. Next fall Noonday Press will publish his book on major twentieth-century English novels.

RENA NILES lives on a farm near Lexington, Kentucky, with her hus-

The Literary Review

Editors

Clarence R. Decker
Charles Angoff

Advisory Editors

Peter Sammartino
Loyd Haberly
Edith Heal

Secretary

Ruth Waldmann

Published Quarterly by
FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON
UNIVERSITY
at Teaneck, New Jersey

Subscriptions \$4.00 a year domestic, foreign \$4.50. U.S. distributor: B. DeBoer, 102 Beverly Road, Bloomfield, New Jersey. Copyright © 1958 by Fairleigh Dickinson University. Published at 212 Xenia Avenue, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Second class mail privileges authorized at Yellow Springs, Ohio, and Teaneck, New Jersey. Unsolicited manuscripts if unaccepted will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. Printed and bound by The Antioch Press, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

band, folksinger and composer John Jacob Niles, and their two sons. She was educated at Wellesley and the Sorbonne. A regular contributor to the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, she also writes occasionally for the *Saturday Review* and *Town and Country*.

LYNN MARQUIZE — actress, singer, artist — is the wife of Gil Orlovitz.

GIL ORLOVITZ's "autobiographical words" appear in the Orlovitz section of this Number of *The Literary Review*.

Forthcoming Numbers

Contemporary Literature Abroad

Argentina (Victoria Ocampo), India (Mulk Raj Anand), Italy (Elémire Zola, Giacinto Spagnoletti, Nicola Chiaromonte, Claudio Gorlier), Japan (Donald Keene), Puerto Rico (Maria Teresa Babin) . . .

Short Stories

Asher Barash, Lorna Beers, Kaatje Hurlbut, Robert Payne, Moshe Shamir, B. M. Steigman, Mark Sufrin, Benjamin Tammuz, K. B. Vaid, D. J. Vincent.

Poetry

Ethan Ayer, Gene Baro, Elizabeth Bartlett, Melville Cane, Mildred Cousens, Willis Eberman, Robert Hillyer, Attila Jozsef (trans. Zoltan L. Farkas), Lermontov (trans. Guy Daniels), William Pillin, Kaye Starbird, Jules Supervielle (trans. Charles Guenther), Isabel Williams Verry, Yiddish poetry (trans. Aaron Schmuller), contemporary Italian poetry (Section I translated by Eric Sellin; Section II translated by Charles Guenther) . . .

Articles

Phyllis Ackerman: "Who Is Kundrie—What Is She?"

Charles Boewe: "Parable"

Robert L. Gale: "Letters to Francis Marion Crawford" (from Henry James, Theodore Roosevelt, Clyde Fitch, Julia Ward Howe)

Frederick R. Karl: "Joseph Conrad's Style and Method"

THE LITERARY REVIEW

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY WRITING

VOLUME 2

WINTER 1958-1959

NUMBER 2

I Walk in the Holy City, *a poem* Yaakov David Kamzon 148

Varieties of Childhood Experience—Stories

The Christmas Virgin August Derleth 149

Another Encounter Eustace Durrett 158

The Summer I was Seven Rena Niles 171

Requiem Virginia Chase 177

The Joys of Childhood Frederick R. Karl 182

Gil Orlovitz

Lyric, *a poem* 196

Some Autobiographical Words 197

Gil Orlovitz, *a drawing* Lynn Marquize 199

More Poems: Diary of Matthew Parson—4; M'sieu Mishiga
—3; The Letters of Great Ape—1; Art of the Sonnet—
XXCII; The Morning of a Clown 200-205

Gray, *a play* 206

I Walk in the Holy City

YAAKOV DAVID KAMZON

I walk in the Holy City,
by pain and trembling tried,
as if a hidden wonder
walked by my side—

And as I step on each stone
the voice of my heart I hear:
Gently! Here once did tread
a seer.

The Christmas Virgin

AUGUST DERLETH

ALL IN THE RUSH of a moment, time turned back and fell away, and suddenly I looked into years gone by, on a Christmas Eve like this, with a freshly-fallen snow outside, and diamonds glittering from the earth wherever streetlight's glow or moonlight lay. I had gone into the church, as on a score of other Christmas Eves, for the annual program, to watch the children come up one by one and make their small recitals, to watch the parents, too. But from the beginning there had been a note of strangeness, a note of something alien in the night, something knocking on the door of memory, and when at last the tableau came—the familiar tableau of the Virgin and the Child at the stable manger—I knew; the door opened, memory burgeoned—the program was the same as on that night more than two decades ago. And at once I was caught in time turning back, the present falling away, and out of the well of the past there rose up once more something I had thought long forgotten, tucked away behind a closed door deep in years gone by.

Twenty years! And more than twenty when that small boy who once was I sat in this same seat in this same gallery looking down upon that tableau, knowing that the girl swathed all in white, the Virgin glowing in the spotlight shining from nearby, was Margery. Two decades gone, and on a night like this, within the same walls, on that familiar makeshift stage where customarily of Sundays the minister stood to preach, the white-robed Virgin and the Child. In that instant, time was no more; the flux and flow of minutes, hours, years ceased to be, two decades fell away, and there below was Margery, the church well's distance away, once more garbed all in white, with the light from above changing from pale yellow to orange to amber . . .

Two decades gone, and everything once again as it was that night, with that small boy filled with the magic and wonder of Christmas and of love. It seemed as if from all around, from the well

of the church below, faces long gone turned up as if to say, *We too, remember!*, as if the walls, the chandeliers, the choir-loft all together joined those who had long since passed into that dark, unknown country, to whisper above the muted playing of the organ, *Yes, we remember, we remember!*, as if the organ itself added its refrain for something starting over, something begun again in an alien place where no clock measured childhood and youth and love and life itself.

Twenty years ago, and on a night like this . . .

She had been practising every night for two weeks, and most of the time her parents had come up—one of them, or both—to see her home, knowing she must pass the house where I lived to come home, knowing I would be sitting there in the darkness waiting for her to come by—alone, so that I could go out to her and walk with her as far as I dared, just to be near her with her shy blue eyes, and her blonde hair, and the way she had of swinging her body and of looking at me from the corners of her eyes.

But she never came alone, and in school she told me how it was.

"They're watching me all the time, Steve. They think I'm seeing you."

They! Always *they*—her parents, who were determined we must part, saying we were too young to know what love was and might be.

"But Christmas Eve my aunt's coming, and they won't wait at church. I'm in the last scene; so I have to change, and they can't wait, with company at home. They fixed it so Miss Rundell walks past your place with me, but she turns off at the next corner. If you could be somewhere past that corner, I'll be slow, I'll make Miss Rundell wait till most everybody else's gone, I'll try . . ."

"I'm coming to the program," I said.

"Oh, no!"

"I want to see you."

"I look—I look silly, truly I do, Steve. I don't want you to see me like that. I look—oh, I can't explain it. You know what they made me do?" She leaned forward in an anxiety of apprehension, her blue eyes wide, her mouth troubled. "I'm the Virgin Mary!"

"I know."

"Who told you?"

"Sim Jones told me. He knows about it."

"Oh, that old Sim! He tells you everything."

"I don't know what's wrong about being the Virgin Mary. It's just a play."

"It's the way I'm dressed. It's a bedsheet or a table-cloth or something, and a veil over my head. It's *awful*!"

"I'm coming."

That night I went with Sim—it was his church, not mine; and it was he who led the way up into the south gallery, because, being shy, he did not want to be down among all the people below, but preferred the intimacy of the small gallery, where no one sat when we came except Horace Sherman, who was arranging the colored slides for the electric lantern to be used to throw a spotlight on the stage. He was too engrossed in his task to look up when we entered. He was a fat young man, so heavy that every time he turned in the cramped corner where he sat he knocked something down—once the box of slides, once an extra socket, and once almost the lantern itself, which he caught just before it slipped over the railing toward the floor below.

I sat in an aisle seat, and Sim sat next to me. It was the first time I had ever been in Margery's church. It was for this that her parents were so intent on keeping us apart, this church so different in its ascetic austerity from that sensuous and mystical atmosphere which prevailed at St. Jude's.

"They wanted me to be in this," confided Sim. "I wouldn't do it. I watched them one night through the window. Your girl's the prettiest one there."

I nodded. I was sure of it. I didn't know any other girl like Margery.

Horace Sherman looked over, his thick lips pursed. "Shhh!" he said loudly.

"He must think he's in the Catholic church," said Sim. "That's where you're not supposed to talk, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

Other people came into the gallery. They filled up the south

gallery, and went into the west galleries. They filled up the well of the church—all the people I knew and some I didn't know. Old Mr. Elky and his wife, old Mrs. Pearson, Mr. Elpy, who had a store down town, and his wife, too, Sim's parents—old Eli, the harness-maker, and his wife. Renna Gluyk and some of the girls with her, Margery's parents, looking stern and forbidding and going down near the front on the north side, right where they could see me if they looked up. But they did not look up; they glanced over at the pews of kids waiting their turn on the program, and then they watched the organist. Margery's mother was a big woman, heavy-set, but not fat; but her father was a small man, with a little slump in his shoulders, as if he had worked too hard or bowed his head too often when her mother spoke, the way people in Sac Prairie said it was, the way it had been when she had made things so miserable for him that he just quit going to St. Jude's. But he didn't belong to her church, either; he was nothing, where religion was concerned, and she could never get him to go anywhere else, even if she had got him to quit St. Jude's. I felt sorry for him, even though I knew it was the same thing all over again now because of Margery and me, only this time he sided with her because there had been enough trouble about religion in that family already.

The minister came in with his wife, and the organist got up and went to the organ. She began to play *Silent Night* very softly, and then she played a medley of Christmas carols, after which she played *Silent Night* again, and this time the choir joined in, also very softly, so that it sounded as if their voices came from far away. Then the minister gave the invocation and the program began. All the little kids from the Sunday School classes marched up the stage, one by one, and stood there trying to remember their lines, piping them out shrilly or indistinctly, confidently or fearfully, and all the time the parents were leaning forward anxiously, as if to catch every word and remember it forever. The Sunday School teachers looked worried and troubled most of the time, trying to keep track of their charges; sometimes they had to run up the aisle after one of them, and sometimes they just lost one altogether, scratching his name off the program after he had been called several times and had not answered. There were forty or fifty little kids, and each

one had a piece to say; some of them were bold and some were frightened; some knew their lines perfectly, and others didn't know three consecutive words, standing there pulling at their trousers or skirts and teetering on their toes and stuttering in an agony of forgetfulness until, after many promptings, they had finished and could clatter down the steps into the pews, mercifully free once more and with only the customary Christmas Eve sack of nuts and candy for each child in Sunday School to look forward to.

After the kids had finished, the tableaux began. First it was the angel and the shepherds; then it was the three wise men. All the time Horace Sherman threw the lights on the tableaux; sometimes they were yellow, sometimes green, sometimes purple, sometimes blue; sometimes the actors looked very good, and sometimes they looked like something left over from three or four Christmases before. It depended on the color of the light; Horace Sherman didn't seem to know the difference; he put in green or purple just as readily as pink or amber or yellow, and he seemed to think that he had to show each tableau in every color light he had, though the curtains always closed on each one before he had time to complete the row of colored slides, so that he tried to do it faster and faster, and finally knocked down several slides and broke them.

Then came the last tableau. In the semi-dusk of the church I could see that white-robed figure I knew was Margery coming down along one wall and going up the steps to the stage behind the curtains, with the choir-loft rising up beyond; after her came someone carrying the cradle, and then Joseph. The shepherds and the three wise men of the previous tableaux had to crowd around the Holy Family, too. They arranged themselves behind the curtains, and then the curtains were drawn apart and there they were.

The first light on them was white, and it made them show just as plainly, and it showed for anyone to see that Margery was lovely, just as I had known she would be, no matter what they put on her. She sat there looking down into the cradle, demure and still, and it was just as if the whole church had lit up at that moment, as if something flowed from her to me and from me to her, binding us together into a kind of oneness nobody could understand, as it was in the spring nights when we met in the moonlit shadows of the

village streets, or at the darkness of the Park Hall, or in the April afternoons when we were together on the hills, and it was always one with us—she and I and the earth and the flowers and the windy sky. That was the way it was, and it grew inside me until I thought I would overflow, until it hurt, being so wonderful and so beautiful. And it seemed to me that she was the same when the light was mauve as when it was white or amber. I hated to see it end.

"See, didn't I tell you?" said Sim in a husky whisper.

I hardly heard him, but I nodded.

"Prettiest one in the whole thing," said Sim.

Then it was over; the curtains were pulled shut; the actors left the stage; the lights in the church were turned up to augment those on the tall Christmas tree near the organ along the north wall. The ushers came around with the plates for the collection, and the minister stood waiting to give the benediction. As soon as the collection plates had been passed, Sim got up impatiently and went out, and I followed him.

"I s'pose you're going to wait for the Virgin Mary," said Sim outside.

"Uh-huh. Not here though. Down a ways. Come on. I'll walk down to the corner with you."

He grinned. "Just the same," he said, striding along, "I'm glad I don't have to wait on a girl. You can have her."

"Thanks," I said.

I knew just where I was going to wait. There was only one large tree, but that was very large; it was an old maple not very far down from the corner, but in a good dark place where no one was likely to see me. Even before we got to the corner by the grain elevator, the people came pouring out of church. At the corner Sim turned and smiled a little, as if to say that he understood and he sympathized.

"Merry Christmas, Steve," he said.

"The same to you," I said.

Then he was off, running down the street toward the Park Hall, near which he lived, and soon his lithe form was lost in the darkness of the shadowed street. He knew that the Christmas present I wanted was to be alone with Margery for a while—an hour or

even half an hour, just to be alone with her somewhere so that I could hold her in my arms and kiss her and tell her I loved her and hear her say it, too. I hurried down the street, slipping past the house of one of Margery's aunts, which was all lit up, and took my place behind the old maple not quite mid-way down that block. It was dark and quiet there, and the moonlight, which lay along the sidewalk, did not penetrate to the side of the trunk where I stood.

All around me the moonlit darkness, the barren trees, the soft, glittering snow seemed to wait, too. Cars went past, one after another, and soon people, too, began to walk by; but I had crossed the street from the church, and most of them walked on the other side of the street from where I stood. I hoped nothing would go wrong with her plan. I hoped I would be able to walk around the block with her, perhaps to stop for a while at the Park Hall in a place where the moonlight shone down among the trees. I heard her parents' voices on the other side of the street; I looked anxiously over. They were alone. Soon all the people had gone by, and I was there alone, too. The players, too, had passed; most of their parents had waited to take them along to where the Christmas tree and the collected gifts waited for their coming.

And then at last she came.

I saw her walking beside Miss Rundell, coming out of the shadowed street into the light at the corner, the arc-light beyond the grain elevator's gauntness. I saw them stop there, before Miss Rundell turned west.

"Are you sure you'll be all right, Margery?" Miss Rundell asked.

"Yes, thank you."

"Perhaps I'd better walk a little way with you?"

"Please don't. It's just a block and a half, and you've got four blocks to go. See—they've got the porch light on for me."

"Well, all right then. Merry Christmas, Margery."

"Merry Christmas, Miss Rundell."

Miss Rundell turned west, and Margery turned east, coming across the street. There she was at the corner north of me now, and walking slowly, so as to give Miss Rundell a chance to get up far enough so that she could not turn around to see us. She walked slower and slower, and, peering out, I saw her looking back up the

street to where I lived, as if she expected me to come down from that direction. Perhaps she thought I had hidden among the shadows of the elevator. I stepped out on to the sidewalk, and she saw me.

She came running. "Oh, Steve," she cried breathlessly. "I thought you weren't here."

"You were wonderful tonight, Margery," I said.

Then she was in my arms, holding me as tightly as I held her, and we stood there in the moonlight, mouth to mouth, clinging together, a kind of wild ecstasy making us not two people but one. The moonlight was wonderful on her face, and her mouth was fresh and lovely against mine. We stood there like that for moment after moment, until it seemed that the pounding of my pulse and the beating of her heart must end in violence; we had been separated too long, we had been too long away from this ecstasy; then we stood apart a little.

"I saw you in the gallery," she said. "Gee, Steve, you looked so good tonight. You looked the nicest I've ever seen you. You've got on a suit."

"Oh, yes."

"You ought to wear suits oftener. You look so good in a suit."

"I hate suits. Margery, let's walk somewhere—around the block, to the Park Hall."

"Oh, Steve—I can't."

"Why not?"

"They're waiting for me."

Instantly the spectre of her parents rose vengefully between us. "Oh," I said.

"You know I want to. Listen, they said I could go to the show Wednesday night."

"I'll be there," I said.

But already the burgeoned hope fell away and died, in that moment I knew it would be like this forever and ever, with her parents coming between us like the wall of the church had separated that Christmas Virgin from the boy in the gallery. I knew it would always be but a few stolen moments one night and another night and another, and the time always farther and farther between, and then no more, and in that instant it seemed that it was not Margery

standing there, but the Christmas Virgin, aloof, untouchable, forever held away from love and the wonderful ecstasy of its fulfilment.

She touched my hand, whispering, "You're not angry, Steve?" "How could I be? It's not your fault."

But deep down inside there were tears that could not and would not come. I held her close to me again, as before, moving my mouth against hers, feeling a brief, wild joy in the way she clung to me—and then she was gone, fled down the street to where that glaring porch light commanded her to come, and the night's fragile beauty was shattered and lost, less tangible than the iridescence of the moonlight on the glittering snow.

Two decades ago!

And there below me the same tableau, the Virgin and Child, with Joseph standing beside and the shepherds and wise men crowding around on the small, impermanent stage, and the lights as before illuminating them from the same corner of the same gallery within the same walls. And afterward everything, too, would be the same.

I rose in the darkness and slipped away from the gallery, out of the church, out into the world of moonlight and snow outside. I walked down the same street alone, past the grain elevator, where I crossed the street to that corner where once I had turned to take my place behind the old maple part way down the block.

I could not turn. I stood there under the arc-light and looked down toward the old maple, still there, as always, and I thought of how the years wore down the fragile love between us and hid Margery away forever save for moments like this, unforeseen, unknown, and I felt again all the lost hope, all the despair, all the bitter disappointment of the boy who stood there that night watching his first girl running down the street away from him toward the house with the porch light where her parents waited; and it was as if somewhere along that street of moonlight and shadows, somewhere in that world of snow and barren trees just ahead, that lonely boy waited still for the day and the hour that never came, the eternal revenant forever in that place at that hour waiting for the Christmas Virgin, and I knew that one of us had failed the other, but had no way of knowing which.

Another Encounter

EUSTACE DURRETT

THE BOY stood at the screen and looked out through the wire rectangles. The grass was green and growing tall for the lawn mower that he could just barely push occasionally for Pop when Pop would let him. The apple tree stood tall and slender just outside the door; sometimes, when the few apples it had fell, they would hit against the screen and fall and break open on the steps. And then the ants. Mother would make him sweep the apple away as far as he could with the red broom and heat hot water and pour it all around the steps. The hot water kept the ants from getting in the house. They couldn't swim like him and they would drown.

In the fork of the apple tree rested a rusty sickle. If the grass got tall and tough instead of tall and tender, Pop would sharpen the sickle with the file that was brown like sand and rough like sand. Pop would let him use it more than he would let him use the lawn mower. And it gave him blisters on his fingers and the palms of his hands. He decided he didn't like sickles and hoped the grass would stay tender like the bacon he had just finished on his plate.

The tree rose tall and thin like Mother's fingers when they made church steeples. The leaves were thin and green and shined like a new buckle. That was 'cause they had water on them. It hadn't been raining. So it must be dew. Pop said dew fell up and rain fell down. But he thought Pop was teasing him. 'Cause the teacher at school had told him that things fell down and things rose up.

Almost at the top of the tree something red, it was an apple, pushed its way out of the green leafage. "Pop, hey Pop. There's an apple. I think it's ripe." He stood on tip toe and could almost raise the hook. Pop came up behind him and picked him up by the arm-pits and he could reach the hook. Pop swung him on through the open door, and he saw the spring bent back.

Kevin raced down the wooden steps, breaking some of the

wood threads of the worn bottom step. He stubbed his toe on one of the loose red bricks, but he didn't let on 'cause Pop would think he was sissy. "Hey, Pop, how we gonna get that apple down from way up there, uhn?"

The old man pulled roll-your-own fillers out of his shirt pocket, picked one, and poured tobacco into it. He pulled the string with his teeth and put the sack and the fillers back in the plaid pocket. After he had rolled and licked the paper and started to hunt for matches, he answered the boy, "Think you could climb up there; that's the only way I can see that you can get it. Either that or you'll have to wait till it falls."

The boy looked at a pyramid of brown with specks hurrying in and out of it, "I have to get it now, Pop. If it falls, the ants'll eat it. The tree's too thin to climb and it's awful tall."

The old man had lit the cigarette and was puffing it. "Maybe, I could lift you. Want to try it?"

"Hey, yeah, that's it, Pop. Lift me up, high as you can."

The grandfather lifted the boy to the fork of the tree. The boy caught on to one of the limbs with one hand and tried to reach the apple with the other, but, "It's still too high, Pop."

"Well, those limbs are too weak for you to climb around on. Hold on, I'll get you a stick." He came back with a clothes prop. The boy watched the clothes wire fall limp and bounce like a ball against the floor when it's almost out of bounces and you've got to drop it higher.

He almost lost his balance when Pop handed him the pole. "Careful or you'll fall and break your ass, boy, and don't go telling your mother that I said that or I'll never hear the end of it. Careful now."

"I won't tell her, Pop. Honest I won't. Are you still going to take me over to the train yard today?"

He probed with the pole, almost fell, and in almost falling, swung an arc with the pole which tapped the apple which Pop caught as it fell like a red ball, except it was bigger, just a little bit, than the rubber balls that swung from paddles. "I'll take you over there later on today."

The boy dropped the pole to the ground and swung down

from the tree. "Here's your apple."

Kevin took the apple and wiped it against his blue pants and bit into it. "Want a bite, Pop; it's good, real good?"

"You go ahead and eat it. You worked hard enough for it."

They walked on back through the yard, through the grape arbor, only the grapes were green and made the whitewash have green shadows instead of purple shadows like they did when they were ripe. The boy followed the old man's boot strides, trying to walk their shadows, back through the maple trees to the big red garage. It was red like fire engines and the lock was rusty and Pop had trouble unlocking it. Only it wasn't the rust; Pop had been using the old key. Pop never threw old keys away. He always kept them and always got them mixed up with the new ones.

Kevin followed him into the dark shed, which scared him a little but he felt alright when he stood in one of the shafts of sunlight that fell through the openings between the boards. Pop took down his saw and got some wire and told him to come on. He had been watching the squirrel trying to hide among the old bags of walnuts. Nobody cared about the nuts—that is, nobody ever ate any of them. And Pop didn't care if the squirrels ate all of them. But Mother was always setting traps and poison for them. She said they were as bad as rats. And Pop would always go out, pick up the poison, throw it in the garbage, and snap the traps with sticks.

The next morning Pop would say to Mother over the table with the red and white checked tablecloth, it was the same table, only it seemed to be a different one every time the tablecloth was changed, that the squirrels were getting smarter every day, throwing traps and eating poison without it hurting them. Or maybe, he would say, the birds got the poison. He said that 'cause Mother liked birds. And he would wink at Kevin when he said it.

Pop went over to the wood pile and took some planks and began marking them with a black pencil and a sliding tape. He had lain the wire down on the ground. "Kevin, will you go back in the garage and get me those wire clippers?" The boy was afraid to go in the garage by himself, but if he said so, Pop would think he was a sissy.

He opened the garage door all the way and propped it with an

old brick so it wouldn't blow shut. It was dark inside. He shut his eyes and started moving in the door but that didn't help either. So he opened them and found the wire clippers and ran back to Pop with them.

"Damn it, I've told you not to run with knives and tools. You want to fall down and gouge your insides out. I ought to tell your mother. She'd tan hell out of your ass for such a stunt."

Pop was mad. Kevin could tell it 'cause he always got real red in the face, almost as red as the garage, only red didn't look that way on skin; it only looked that way on wood. And Pop had a beard too and that threw shadows over the red on his face. Mother had said he shouldn't get Pop mad, 'cause he got red in the face like that when he got mad 'cause he had high blood pressure and that made him sick like the time last year when he had to go to the hospital. He wanted to tell Pop about the black ghost in the garage, that only spoke to him, but might hurt anybody like hitting them over the head with a brick or something. Only he was afraid Pop wouldn't understand. He had never told anybody about the black ghost that lived in the garage. And that was why he ran and forgot about the clippers being sharp.

"Oh, for God's sake, a big boy like you isn't going to cry, is he? Come on now and give me a hand with this birdhouse. I can't do it all by myself."

And Pop might die if he got too mad and that was worse than being sick 'cause Pop had been out of the church so long he might go to hell. And "It's just sweat, Pop. Boy, that sun's hot. Aren't you hot? I wasn't crying. I forgot about running with those old wire clippers. What can I do? Can I drive some nails?"

"Later, boy. You hold that plank while I saw."

Pop had Kevin sit in the shade for awhile on the wood pile, where most of the planks were wide and not too high. They were all fairly long, but one was long and you could jump on it like the sec-saws at the park.

There was a lot of sawdust around and Pop cursed it 'cause it made him sneeze. A measuring worm was hunching his back across a plank. Pop said they could measure things, that everytime they

hunched themselves, they measured an inch. He had asked Pop why he didn't use them to measure with instead of a rule. Rules cost money, but the worms could be caught and put in a jar like lightning bugs. But Pop would just laugh.

The screen door opened and Mother, skinny in a red apron and a white dress with red dots (but she wasn't skinny, that's what you call people when they're not nice looking.) And she wasn't fat either. She was like all women with smiling eyes are.

"Come on you two, and wash up. Dinner's ready."

"Okay," Pop wrinkled his forehead. The wrinkles in his forehead weren't like those in Mother's. Hers were thin and were only there when she was worried or mad. Pop's were large and they stayed there and were bigger than Mother's ever were, even when he didn't wrinkle them on purpose.

"Come on, boy. Let's get ready for dinner."

They were seated at the table and Mother was laying forks around the table. Kevin was pleased that she had put the real white plate with the swords and knight's armor at his place. Mother said it was a coat of arms and that he should be proud of it. He wasn't sure what a coat of arms meant but she had told him that it meant that his father's family was real old and could trace themselves back. There was a bowl just like it. Kevin liked both of them.

"Kevin, you haven't washed. The back of your hands are dirty and there's a circle of dirt around your face."

She was dipping vegetable soup in their bowls. That was one of his favorite foods. Only he liked it better when it came out of the cans—the canned soup was full of letters and sometimes you could spell your name out KEVIN BALDOUX. That was a lot more fun than having one of those old nuns in their black habits stand over you, only you shouldn't call them old, even though some of them were, 'cause they were holy people, and told you that you were putting the blocks together wrong. The blocks you played with at school were different than those you played with when you were a baby—that Mother had put up in the closet—they were wood and the ones at school were big and black on yellow paper.

"Kevin, you're not going to eat until you wash. Do I always have to tell you? Do you want to get all that dirt and germs inside of

you? You'll get sick and I'll have to get the doctor to give you shots."

"Oh, leave the boy alone."

"You can't get all the dirt off the first time? Ain't that right, Pop?"

"Of course, you can't." Pop dipped the big spoon that was shaped like an egg where it held the soup and broke a cracker and started eating.

"Dad, how do you expect me to get Kevin to obey when you tell him that everything he does is alright?"

"Oh, let him alone. He's alright. A little dirt never hurt a growing boy. You're awful choosy about the dirt you put around your flowers and they grow big and strong."

Mother was mad at Pop. Kevin wished she wasn't, but she had forgotten to make him go wash his hands. The soup was red like tomatoes and smelt like them when she was canning them; hot and made your nose sort of smart but it felt good. All the vegetables were at the bottom of the bowl and he had to scoop with his spoon to get the big soft pieces of tomato and the green peas that were littler but round like marbles.

"Dad, did I tell you? Vergie is coming in tonight. She's going to stay overnight. I don't know where she's going to sleep. I guess I can let her and Jim sleep in my bed. I'll make a pallet on the floor."

"Hell, Marge, there's no sense in your giving up your bed. I can sleep on the floor for a change or Kevin could. It wouldn't hurt him. It's warm and he likes to sleep on the floor in the summertime, anyway."

"Hey, Mom, can I sleep on the floor? Can I?"

"I don't know. I'll think about it. Dad, these nights are still pretty chilly. I wouldn't want him catching cold and missing school when it's almost out, anyway."

They had finished eating and she had made him help her with the dishes and Pop had gone out to work some more on the bird house. Darn it, he wanted to watch Pop cut the wire with the clippers. They were like the big black scissors the barber had, except even bigger. The tea towel was white with a faded blue rooster on it. There were some words but Kevin didn't understand them. Something about feed.

"Okay, go out and play."

"I'm not playing, Mother. I'm working. I'm helping Pop build a bird house."

"Okay, go ahead and help Pop work then."

He threw the cloth on the table and ran outdoors. "Kevin, come back and hang that up," but he walked faster and then started to run toward Pop.

Pop was fitting the wire into the frames. "Hey, are we going over to the railroad?"

"Sure," he drove two nails and they met where Pop had driven the first one. "Help me put these things away. I'll paint this some other time."

Pop was rustling papers like a mouse at night. Finally, he found a brown bag that suited him; he shook it out, refolded it, and stuck it in behind his buckle with part of it sticking out. "Okay, boy, let's go."

The sickle which hurt Kevin's hands had fallen out of the tree and was sticking in the ground. Pop picked it up and said, "We'll have to do better than that." He wiped the mud from the blade and put it back in the part of the tree where the trunk spread out to make branches.

"Want to help me find a stick?"

"How big a one do you want?"

"A little longer than the rulers you use at school and just about that thick."

Kevin found a stick but it was too short, but Pop found another and sharpened the end of it. "What are you going to use the stick for, Pop?"

"You'll find out."

As he ran ahead Kevin heard Pop call out to him, "Open the gate." The walk between the garage and the next yard wasn't made of bricks like the others were. There were a lot of long wooden planks that touched each other and there were cracks where the weeds grew through. Pop liked to let them grow tall with ragged leaves and white seeds; then he would get the sickle real sharp and make long swings at the weeds.

"Well, hell, why don't you open it, why are you just standing there?" Pop turned the piece of wood that locked the gate and started to cuss, "Damn it, I've got a splinter in my finger."

It wasn't a little splinter like Kevin sometimes got in his hands, that swelled up into a sore patch of white skin that looked like the time he had punched his finger through the glassing on the stove door and burnt his finger. The splinter was thin and stuck long out of and long in Pop's thumb. Blood spurted out of the torn skin and streamed down Pop's hands like rain on the window. Kevin was scared and looked at the red garage that had drifts of dust where Pop never sprayed it and he wondered if the Black Ghost had done this to Pop. "Does it hurt very much? I'll go get some iodine."

"Oh, it hurts a little bit; I don't need any iodine on it." Pop had pulled the splinter out and more blood oozed over his hand. He pulled a big blue handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped and held it to his hand till the bleeding stopped.

"Let me close the gate, Pop."

"Alright, go ahead."

In the alley the air was pungent with the sun and the manure that the ragman's horse left there every day. It was yellow with flakes of brown like the scorched corn that Mother fixed for Pop 'cause he liked it that way. A lot of people said it was nasty, his Mother said that, and he didn't like to touch it or walk in it, but Pop would shovel some of it sometimes and put it around flowers and the flowers were always pretty and big in their yard.

"There's nobody home at the last two houses. We can look in both of their yards."

"What are we going to look for, Pop?"

"To see if they have any stale bread for the birds; that's why I brought the stick and the bag along. You can hold the bag while I look for bread."

"But Pop, won't that be stealing?"

"What difference does it make; they've thrown it out."

"But Pop . . ."

"Be quiet, boy."

Kevin fell silent 'cause Pop had deepened his voice like he

always did when he meant something and was not going to argue about it, but just do it or see that it was done. He hadn't raised his voice; in fact, he had lowered it, but it was deep like that anyway.

The sun burnt black streaks and bubbles of tar out of the red roof of the shed. They were sticky and hot 'cause he had touched one once when he had helped Pop work on the kitchen roof. The house was white and dark with shade; the windows were like black pools of water. There was a pile of kindling that the garbage cans sat on. It was next to the shed which had rain-rotted wood, at least that was what Pop said made it soggy and smelly like that.

Big green flies flew out of the garbage can that Pop was poking his stick in and Pop swatted at one of them that landed on his pant's leg but missed it. "Hold that sack open," he whispered. And he pulled two pieces of bread that were hard and crumbly out of the can and raked them off the stick into the bag. He pulled out another one and then put the top back on the can. Kevin was glad of that 'cause it smelt like tomatoes that Mother threw out when they had a lot of mold on them.

They shouldn't be doing this 'cause Mother always said that you should ask anyone for something if you wanted it, even if it was just an old dandelion to blow the white fluff off of. Besides it was a sin to steal, a mortal sin too and Pop was out of the church and if he kept on drinking and carousing around he would go that much deeper in hell and the flames were hotter than the sun on the tar roof.

The next yard had a wire fence like a chicken coop. They went in but could find no bread. "Pop, you ought to take those pieces of bread back. That's stealing and what if they caught us . . ."

"Good God almighty, boy, your voice is so shrill, I couldn't steal if I wanted to."

It was no use talking to Pop, but he had tried to keep him from stealing. Mother would have to believe him. They were walking in sawdust now. The luggage plant had a big smokepipe that ran sideways out of the building instead of up and down and dropped sawdust instead of smoke. Pop stepped down through the opening in the plank fence and out into the commons. Kevin followed him. "Hey, Pop, how many A&P trucks do they have here?"

"A whole lot."

"I want to drive one when I get big."

"I thought you were going to be an engineer."

"I'll do both. I'll drive a train one day and a truck the next."

They continued through the commons, past the high bunch of weeds he sometimes hid behind when he played hide and seek with the kids next door after school and late at night when the lightning bugs went on and off in the air. Some of the men who were unloading one of the big trucks spoke to Pop as they passed through the steel wire gates.

On the way up the street Pop stopped in at the saloon and got one of those brown bottles of whiskey. "Pop, you had better not get that. Mother will be mad."

"Let's go up and see the trains."

Kevin looked through the dark smelly viaduct and then at the concrete steps and followed Pop up them. After they had reached the top, he could look down at the people walking below; if he would spit now, it would fall on their heads and the automobiles making loud noises in the viaduct and sweeping up the hill like Mother's broom over his head when she was sweeping the top step and he was sitting on the bottom step.

Turning around he could see the switch yard ahead. Cinders and rails catching the sun like flashlights at night. There were men in loose blue waist coats and overalls. And rusty looking boxcars with blocks and swoops of letters and numbers on them. Some of them had their doors open and you could look through them and see what was on the next side. The tracks ran big and wide down to points. "Pop, why do the tracks get little?"

"They just look that way."

They sat down on a wooden bench and Pop started talking to one of the blue coated men, "This is my grandson, Kevin. I brought him over to see the trains. He's crazy about them. Isn't that right, Kevin? This is Mr. Wallace."

"Hi, Kevin. You like 'em, uhn?" The trainman must be nearly as old as Pop. His hair was white and his head was shiny and bald in spots. He had the blue cap stuck way back on his head till if he pushed it any further, it would fall to the cinders. A red handker-

chief like Pop's blue one was tied around his neck. "Did you hear the Lewis fight the other night, Henry?"

One of the engines banged and two boxcars fell off it and rolled down the tracks. Kevin wondered how such big cars could stay on such little tracks and what happened to them when they got down to the point where the tracks ran together, only Pop said they didn't, but they did.

"Hey, Henry, what the hell you got in your pocket? You trying to hold out on me?"

"I've got to take care of Kevin."

Smoke and fire bellowed out of the engine and it had hooked on to some of the other cars. It started pushing them backwards and some man in blue waved his hands at the engineer who was leaning out the window. And it started forward again. The train got over on one of the other tracks some way and a man hooked another car on it. The big wheels started to roll and make clicking noises and the big bar on the side went up and down.

"Oh, hell, open it up and let me have a swig anyway."

"Pop, that train's going on down where the tracks get pointed."

"They don't get pointed. I told you they look that way. Don't you believe me? He's a kid who only believes what his eyes tell him. We'll walk down there after while and those big tracks here will look pointed and those down there will look big."

How could the tracks change their sizes? "Good, Pop, when are we going?"

"In a little while. Okay, damn it, one swig and I'll take one with you, but let's get out of sight. I don't want to be handing it out to every poor son-of-a-bitch in the switch yard."

Kevin stood up and stretched his legs. "Kevin, you stay there and keep away from the trains. Tom and I will be back in a minute." The two men moved off behind the green slated building with the black windows.

The cinders lay black, gray and blue around his brown sandals. He had scars on his knees where he had fallen on some cinders in the school yard playing whip where you join hands and run and the ones in front whip around real fast and most of the kids on the end of the line will fall on their knees and their tails.

The tracks looked that way from here where he stood and would look different wherever he went, so Pop said. He moved closer to the brown pieces of wood that held the tracks in place, Pop called them ties. He looked but there was no difference. He moved closer till he was standing by the brown logs and the tracks grew longer and came to another point way off there where you could just make out that white house with the blue roof.

He stood on one of the crossties and looked down and he could see that the point before disappeared and there was still another. He tried to walk the crossties but he had to step between them on the black cinders 'cause his legs couldn't reach that far. That was fun. He stepped upon the shiny iron rail and balanced himself like he had this morning on the tree when he was trying to get the apple. He wondered if that was what caused the sickle to fall. If he had hit it with his foot. That was a good way to scar his shoes and they were new and Mother had spanked him for scarring the last pair the day after he had bought them. But he hadn't done it on purpose. He had been playing in them like she said but he hadn't been playing rough.

One foot forward and he slipped and fell inside the rails like he had almost fallen from the tree. He stepped back upon the iron rails, got his balance so he wouldn't fall and started taking one step at a time, waving his arms like the referees at the basketball games.

The more he waved his arms and the closer he walked toward the point it grew further back . . . "Jesus Christ" . . . and that was Pop and he shouldn't cuss. *WHOO WHOO* . . . that was a train but he couldn't see it, it must be behind . . . "Get off those goddamn tracks" . . . That was Pop and he was running toward him 'cause he could hear the cinders and the train must be on this track and he lost his balance and fell to the ground inside the rails again 'cause he had been waving with that arm and he had fell and hurt his shoulder and his knees and must have broke what Pop said he would break. He jumped to his feet and turned and the black engine, black as the Black Ghost . . . it must be the Black Ghost disguised as a train with its yellow eye in the middle of its round face with bolts and the white smoke coming out with cinders with red fire on them that hit the ground and had showered him once a

little bit and burnt like the stove that time but there weren't enough of them so it didn't make Mother put a bandage on his fingers like that time and the big wheels going round to knock him down again and cut off his arms and legs like that man Pop told him about or Mrs. Byrnes' husband who had been hit by the one crossing the yards and had his head cracked open like hammers and coconuts and whitish grey like coconut spilled all over the place with blood and rolled around and around on the ground. And Pop jerked his arm and pulled him out of the way and his face stung and burned. "Pop, you slapped me." It hurt where Pop slammed him down on the platform and he thought his pants were torn by the splinters and if he tore his pants he would tell Mother that Pop had done it. "You little fool, can't I turn my back on you without you killing yourself? Get up, we're going home." Pop's face was red. "I'll see you, Tom."

The whiskey bottle lay on its side and the whiskey was running all over the cinders like the sweat over Pop's face and his face was red like early this morning. And he wouldn't talk to Kevin except to tell him to shut up his crying; that he'd have something to cry about when they got home.

He wasn't a sissy and he wasn't scared but . . . "Pop, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Don't be mad at me . . . I won't do it again. Don't tell Mother . . . Talk to me, Pop . . . please . . ."

The Summer I Was Seven

RENA NILES

I REMEMBER my childhood as a time when I longed most of all to be grown up, because to be grown up meant to be free. If my parents pointed out that adults, too, are restricted, unable to do many of the things they most desire, I did not bother to argue, but smiled at the naïveté of my elders in thinking that a child already seven would believe such obvious nonsense. It is probably a measure of the kindness with which I was reared that I cannot remember ever being lonely or afraid, but recall only the incessant drive to be free. The love of loving adults can be a heavy yoke for a child to bear.

That is why I remember the summer I was seven, when so many others have been forgotten. For a fraction of time, the yoke was lifted.

My parents had planned things differently. They had selected the village of Petit-Bornand in the Haute-Savoie as the perfect spot for my grandmother and me to spend the summer. They brought us there, the very old and the very young, and settled us in a pretty little *pension*. Our bedroom windows looked out to the Alps, across a stream that was turbulent with rapids and trout. And because Grandmother was so very old, they engaged a nurse for me. Her name was Marie.

Marie was seventeen. Her widowed mother, who operated the village bakery, was happy to see her daughter profitably employed. She plied me with *croissants*, hot and crisp from her oven, and pinched my cheek painfully but with good humor. Marie promised my mother that she would tend me faithfully. She was to come and fetch me every morning; her duties ended when she returned me to my grandmother in time for the evening meal.

I liked Marie from the start. After the English governess I had left in Paris, Marie seemed almost a friend. Later I was to discover the great gap that lay between seven and seventeen, but that only increased my regard for Marie: she had her own plans, and she

let me have mine. It was altogether fitting and proper.

Our conspiracy involved a third character, a lad named Jean. The years have washed away all but his name. Whether he was tall or short, dark or fair, I could never say. I remember only that his name was Jean and that Marie loved him.

Marie herself I remember well. She was a short, squat individual with reddish hair, a freckled face and small pale blue eyes. I don't suppose she would have been called pretty, but her skin was stretched taut over her face, and it had a nice shine to it. She looked clean, and she smelled of a faint dairy smell that was very pleasant.

We met Jean on our first day together. "Shall we take a walk?" Marie had said. And when I agreed, she chose the way, and took me down a dusty lane between fields of wheat flowered over with cornflowers and poppies.

"Let's climb the mountains," I said.

"Mountains are to look at, not to climb," Marie said. "Let's pick cornflowers. I'll make a crown for your hair."

Dutifully, I began to pick. "Leave the poppies alone, they'll wilt," Marie ordered.

It was while I was picking cornflowers that Jean appeared. Whether he came up the lane or across the field I do not know. Suddenly he was there, and Marie said: "Would you like to take a walk—all alone, like a big person?"

This was the first time I had ever been allowed to go anywhere alone. I still could not believe that such incredible good fortune was to be mine.

"You mean, you aren't coming with me?"

"Why, no, you silly. You walk down the road as far as the first barn. Then come back. Don't go beyond the barn or the witch will get you."

"What witch?"

"Never mind what witch! Go on and come back."

I started out, walking at first and glancing back over my shoulder to make sure they would not follow, then running. Finally I began to tire. The butterfly net which I had brought was heavy and a nuisance besides, for I had forgotten the jar at home and catching a butterfly would have done me no good. I dragged it

along as I walked down the lane, kicking up little puddles of dust. Everywhere I looked I could see only the endless stretch of wheat, higher than my head. Had I missed the barn? The wheat was tall, maybe the barn was hidden by it. Maybe I had passed it and was heading straight for the witch.

I turned back and started to run. Where had I left Marie? I called her as I ran, and when I got no answer, I began to yell her name in real earnest.

Then I saw her, coming through the field. Or rather, I saw her head, floating above the yellowing stalks of grain, as if borne on an invisible platter. "Marie!" I called, almost in tears. "Where have you been? I've been calling you!"

"I heard you, you little demon! What do you want to do, wake the dead in the cemetery?"

"But I thought you'd gone," I wailed.

"Hush now." She hugged me with real affection. "Remember—never yell. That's the first rule."

"Where's Jean?" I said.

She laughed deep down in her throat and smoothed back her hair. "You scared him away."

Marie taught me, the city child, to know the country. She showed me where to hunt for butterflies, how to bait a trout-line, how to climb mountains, where to find berries and wild flowers. She took me high up on the hill where the witch lived, and showed me the fine trick of chasing the poor old creature's goats down into the valley, eluding the shower of rocks that followed us. It was a thrilling chase, and we, the hunted, delighted in it.

Marie taught me many things, but best of all, she taught me how to be alone. And when I had learned my lesson well, she began to absent herself more and more, secure in the thought that never again would I yell for her and alert the countryside.

We had our own ways of meeting and of parting. Each morning, Marie came to fetch me, looking very neat and starched and almost pretty. She would greet my grandmother with a "*B'jour, Madame, comment va le rhumatisme?*", and never waiting for the old lady's reply, would take me by the hand and lead me down

the steep stairs of the *pension*.

Our first stop was always the cross-roads shrine, where Marie knelt before the weathered oak madonna and said a few prayers, urging me to do likewise. I was sure Marie was a very devout person, but inept at prayer, I could do no more than wait out her devotions. Then Jean would appear, and the two of them would leave, hand in hand. At first, I had followed them, but before long I was glad enough to see them go alone. We all met at the shrine in time for the Angelus. Again, there were prayers by Marie, while Jean and I listened to the stillness of the late afternoon. Then Jean would vanish, and Marie and I made our way back to the *pension*.

There must have been rainy days that summer, but I cannot remember them. I remember only the endless sunshine and the hunting for butterflies. Early in the season I had discovered that I lacked the true angler's patience. It was more fun to stand knee-deep in swirling rapids, pitching rocks or trying to grab up some of the minnows that rushed by in slithering schools. But even that sport soon paled in comparison to the thrill of chasing the magnificent butterflies that abound in the Alps. I was not too accurate with the net, nor very fleet of foot, but occasionally I caught a fine specimen and popped him into the cyanide jar I carried with me.

Why a child of seven should have been permitted to carry a jar of deadly poison I cannot explain. Probably it had come with the net—the gift of an uncle—and in the rush and bustle of closing up the Paris apartment, no one had taken time to discover what it contained. I knew only that it was poison, that I must not eat it or even suck my hands after handling the jar, and that it was a wonderful thing to have because it put butterflies to sleep with no pain at all. The jar itself was a glass container about as tall as a pint fruit-jar, though narrower, and the cyanide was caked at the bottom, about an inch thick. You popped your butterfly into the jar, screwed the lid tight and waited five minutes. That was all.

Toward the end of the summer, my schedule had become established in a routine as precise as the mayor's. In the morning I chased butterflies. At noon, I returned to the shrine, hid my net and jar under some bushes, spit on my hands and rubbed them off on the grass to rid them of any speck of poison, and settled down

to a pleasant solitary lunch of hard rolls and still harder chocolate. In the afternoon I either explored new country, waded in the stream, or visited the witch, whose goats I no longer chased and whom I had discovered to be a nice old woman, quite daft but harmless. She told me she could change me into a speckled hen if she had a mind to do it, and fed me excellent goat's cheese and honey. Before the Angelus sounded, I was back at the shrine. Marie was never late.

One day I came to the shrine earlier than usual, expecting to wait for Marie. But I found her already there. She was sitting on the ground, her face buried in her hands, weeping bitterly.

"Marie, what's the matter? Did you hurt yourself?"

She shook her head, but did not answer.

"Marie—tell me. What's wrong?"

She lifted a tear-stained face, dirt-streaked as a child's. "It's Jean, *le cochon*!"

"What's the matter with Jean?"

"With him, *ce salaud*? Nothing's the matter with him. It's me. He's left me. . . ." And she began to weep a great wailing flood of tears.

Still I waited. So far I had heard nothing to explain all this lamentation.

"My life is over," Marie sobbed. "I'm going to kill myself."

"Really?" I was full of wonder and admiration now. "How will you do it? Will you shoot your brains out?"

"*Petite idiote!*" Marie, whose moods were as quick to change as my own, was laughing. "And disfigure myself in the bargain? Never."

"Will you jump off a cliff?"

"And break a leg? Not a chance."

We were silent then, except for Marie's occasional snuffling. The butterfly net lay on the ground, and beside it, the jar of cyanide.

"Look, Marie, here's a good way. You can have my jar of butterfly poison to sniff. It will put you to sleep, like the butterflies."

Marie sniffed and wrinkled up her nose. "Pugh . . . Smells like rotten almonds. What is it?"

"They call it cyanide."

"Cyanide?" Marie stared at me in horror and disbelief. "*Petit*

démon! What are you doing with a poison like that?"

"It came with the net," I said.

"I'll tell your grandmother, I will. I'll tell her you try to poison poor innocent people with your cyanide."

"But I don't! I use it only for butterflies. I offered it to you because you didn't want to blow your brains out or jump from a cliff."

"I'll tell her, just the same."

"Then I'll tell her you leave me alone all day and go off with Jean, and then Mama won't pay you."

Marie's face wrinkled into a smile. "Come on, let's keep our secret. I won't say a word about the poison, and you keep still about Jean and me. Agreed?"

We agreed. But it didn't really matter, because Jean never came to meet us at the shrine again. We still went there every morning, and Marie lingered longer than ever at her prayers. Then we set out, the two of us. It was sad to have Marie with me. Not that she interfered with what I wanted to do. She was very quiet and detached. But here once again was a grown person, or a person nearly grown, tagging my footsteps. There was a feeling of fall in the air. "Soon you'll be going back to Paris," Marie would say, "and to your buck-toothed English governess. She'll straighten you out!" I didn't have the heart to argue.

The chill air of the high Alps seeped down from the mountains and settled like a blanket over the pleasant valley. The wheat had been cut, and among the stubble only a few withered cornflowers remained. The poppies had blown to dust.

Requiem

VIRGINIA CHASE

SHE ROSE heavily, bearing down on the trowel. There was nothing like kneeling to make you feel your weight, she thought. And she had been kneeling for half an hour, digging about the monument, crumbling the earth with her broad fingers while she set out the bleeding hearts and lobelias she had brought with her. Though she had packed them carefully in wet newspapers and shielded them from the sun, they were already wilting from the long drive. As soon as she got her breath, she would take her can to the well and get some water for them.

She shaded her eyes with her arm, its fair skin burned from the sun that had streamed through the open car window, and looked about while she waited for steadiness. The lots were all mown—for Memorial Day the town took care of those that would otherwise be forgotten—and most of them were decorated. Some had beds of pansies; some, apple blossoms in hoary sprays, laid on the graves or propped against the monuments; some, bright tulips in jars. A few had tubs of geraniums. Here and there a flag hung motionless on its slender, darkened staff.

She had not seen the place for twenty-five years, yet everything was the same. The stones, of course, rain-streaked and moss-grown. The elms, which even in her childhood had had their growth. The faint fragrance of lilies-of-the-valley. The silence.

It was a strange silence, one that you got nowhere except in a graveyard at dusk. There was something unreal about all movement then. She saw things as in a pantomime. The three women in the distance—one arranging her flowers; one gathering up some dampened, discarded papers; one starting off with her milk bottle to the well. The sexton in a remote corner, swinging his scythe in slow rhythm. It was a soft silence. A padded silence. She had a feeling that if she spoke no word would come.

She continued to stand, watching the light as it fell among

the elms and maples. Then her eyes touched the tomb, and instantly the silence became electrified. Middle-aged though she was, she caught again something of the old feeling.

The tomb had held real magnetism for them as children. They had been drawn in its direction, unable to take their eyes from its grassy mound and iron door, yet they had hurried, going past. Once, she remembered, Dammie Owens had thrown a rock at that iron door. The rest of them had stood at a distance until it struck and then run, blocking their ears to its reverberations.

She turned back, her blood still quickened. No, almost nothing had changed. The myrtle had spread, of course, and the gravel paths grown narrower. Her eyes lingered on them. They moved her more, perhaps, than anything else. She thought of the Sunday afternoons when, as a girl, she and her friends had walked in pairs sedately up and down them, never giggling or teasing as they did everywhere else, for this was not, they had been told, a place for laughter. It belonged to the dead, who rested there. Those who entered it must walk, not skip. They must keep to the paths only. They must never, never step on a grave. The only child in town who did that was Dammie Owens. The whole world was a grave, she said. You stepped on bones wherever you went. Dammie not only stepped on the graves; she did something else that was especially forbidden. She picked and ate the strawberries which grew upon them. Someone always threatened to tell, but no one had.

A bird sang—maybe an oriole. She hardly knew one bird's song from another. Dammie had loved birds, she remembered. Right in the middle of a game she would stand stock-still and listen when one sang.

She could still see Dammie, dark and quick and fearless. "Dare me?" she was always saying. That was how she had got her name. Most people, she supposed, would associate Dammie with the Fourth of July when no one disputed her right to set off the fire crackers and the Roman candles. Yet her own memories centered on Memorial Day when year after year the two of them, walking hand in hand, had led the procession, following the old soldiers, up and down these very paths.

Other children chose their own partners, but she and Dammie

had been assigned to each other by the ladies of the Relief Corps. "It's because you're the littlest," her mother had told her severely as she helped her on with her starched white dress. But she had known better, and so had Dammie. They were chosen because they were the prettiest children in town. They had the reddest cheeks, the deepest dimples, the longest curls. "Just like fairies," some spectator always said as they passed. Or, "Such beauties! One so light and one so dark."

Even after they had grown too old to lead, they had marched together. It was from habit, she supposed, since they were not close friends. Or it might have been from a kind of bondage.

The town clock struck seven. She had almost a hundred miles to go. She ought to have left home earlier. She had meant to, but she had slowed up a lot since she began to get heavy. Harry would be expecting her by nine. Still she didn't start. For twenty-five years she had hardly thought about this place. The only claim it had on any of them was her baby sister's grave, and until this year when her parents had grown all of a sudden feeble, they themselves had come to tend it. But now that she was here, she felt held, somehow. She wished she had looked ahead and planned to stay longer. There were people in town she would like to see again. People she would like to ask about. But she had to get off. It was dusk already.

First, though, she would have to give the flowers a soaking. She bent with effort, picked up the can, and started up the gravel path. The feel of the path moved her even more than the sight of it. The feel and the sound. The gravel was loose, cushioned here and there with grasses. The crunch of it under her feet seemed loud in the silence. Unconsciously she fell into step as though to music.

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Past Ephraim Holt, lying with his two wives within the massive iron fence . . .

Past Baby Osgood, resting beneath her marble lamb . . .

Past Patience Dodge, Gone but not Forgotten, and Susan Pert, Asleep in Jesus . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

She and Dammie together . . . The rustle of their starched white dresses . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

The thin piping of the fife . . . The slow march . . . The stop at every flag-marked grave . . . *Halt . . . Forward . . .* The roll-call at the Soldiers' Monument . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Before she could see the well, she heard the clatter of its reel. Someone was ahead of her. The path turned, and she saw a woman, stout like herself, with dark skin and close-cut grey hair, raising the bucket. She looked at her sharply, seeking a resemblance to someone she had known, but saw none.

"Be through in no time," the woman called, turning faster.

"I'm in no hurry," she called back. She was in a hurry, or at least she ought to be. But she welcomed any delay.

The woman bent and deftly pulled the bucket up. "There's plenty for the two of us. Set down your can."

She set it down and the woman filled it, quick yet careful not to let the water overflow. Then the woman filled her own can and dropped the bucket back into the well. There was the running rattle of the chain; then a soft, hushed splash as the bucket hit the water.

"The yard looks nice," the woman said as they started off, speaking pleasantly, courteously, as one would in a place like this to a stranger.

"Real nice," she answered.

They fell into step.

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

The stones were whiter now, sharpened by the growing dusk. The ivy had lost its gleam.

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

The air was heavy with the sweetness of lilies-of-the-valley. No one was in sight except the sexton, looking up from his scythe to

study the sky.

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Past Ephraim Holt, lying with his two wives within the massive iron fence . . .

Past Baby Osgood, resting beneath her marble lamb . . .

Past Patience Dodge, Gone but not Forgotten . . .

Past Susan Pert, Asleep in Jesus . . .

They walked slowly, occasionally shifting their cans from one hand to the other. Finally the woman spoke.

"It brings memories back to me."

"And to me," she answered.

The starched white dresses. The hot cheeks. The loosened curls. The thin legs so hard to hold back.

They walked again in silence. The only sound was the remote rattle of the sexton's wheelbarrow as he carried away his tools for the night.

Left . . . Right . . .

Left . . . Right . . .

Two stout, grey-haired women, walking heavily.

At the end of the path they separated with pleasant good-nights. One went and knelt again before the bleeding hearts and the lobelias. The other left the path and cut across the graves, bending once to pick and eat a ripening strawberry, then standing, stock-still, while a late lark sang.

The Joys of Childhood

FREDERICK R. KARL

THE SLIGHTLY-TORN BOOK held to her thin breast, one arm swinging freely, Nerissa, a small curve of a child, romped along the street without a desire or a worry. All odds and ends, edges and fragments, thin pieces jutting around corners, she ran with angles and skipped with a floating motion. A slight arrangement of limbs that flapped and swayed, always in movement, graceful, rhythmic, withal an ingratiating awkwardness that would, perhaps, disappear with maturity.

It was not dark but that time in late afternoon in the winter of the year when shadows replace sunlight and shortly after dip into cold and greyness. The street lights glimmered heroically, many fading dully or in disrepair, those with jagged edges like gargoyles in approaching evening. The long shadows enfolded Nerissa, catching her bodily and then sliding away, merging and outlining dozens of little girls, soon to recede and become still as she passed. The only quickness on the street was a small child coming home from an afternoon party.

The season was a time for festivity and conviviality, but the houses in the treeless streets stood squalid and exhausted, while cheerless, undecorated windows yawned blackly. Occasional objects framed themselves jaggedly against a dim, flickering light, like skew teeth in the corrugated palate of an old cripple. Although Nerissa's neighborhood rarely brightened with Christmas parties, the Robinson twins had been lucky this year. Nerissa knew that she had not been invited because Mrs. Robinson was a shrew with a tyrannical husband. Often, Nerissa heard shouting and fighting in the Robinson flat, the noises edging through closed windows, filtering through cracks in the ceiling and walls. Then her mother would enter to soothe her fears; but in her dreams the echo of screaming voices and tortured bodies was a wild, emotional melody. Then the echo grew sharper, the dream withered, and Mr. Robinson attacked

his wife. She, in frustration, turned with maniacal fury toward the children, beating and nagging, or turning them into the street with threats and curses. So in their need the older Jane and Jimmy applied themselves to Nerissa. She dimly suspected that if Mr. and Mrs. Robinson died suddenly, the twins would almost immediately abandon her, and, accordingly, she prayed without hesitancy that all the Robinsons should die. But now, as long as she obliged them—and their moods varied—they tolerated her presence; but let her attempt self-assertion or defiance and both were prepared to act brutally.

Not that they struck her—their methods were more subtle, as if despite the physical displeasure from their parents' beatings they still realized that other forms of punishment, if not so direct, were crueler and more substantial. Consequently, they tortured Nerissa diabolically, with a complexity and sense of understatement that prophesied depravity if they continued unthwarted. They persistently misled her and took advantage of her good will and naïveté: when she was friendly they became cold and distant; when she ran up to play they dissolved their activities and walked away; when she offered them a gift, food or a toy, they took it and dashed it into the street; as a final fillip, they organized the other children and made them refuse to speak or play when she came close. At times, however, they would seem friendly and put Nerissa at ease, only to tease or torture her when she attempted to become intimate. Frequently, she didn't understand what they meant or how she should react, and her bewilderment unknowingly abetted their fun. One day, Nerissa was watching the soapy sink suds grow into whirlpools and then eddy into confusion, when "Risa, Risa" pierced the gray apartment. Nerissa ran, tripping over the cat, and burst into Jimmy Robinson, who said he had a dog.

Nerissa bit, "Where?"

"Around."

"I don't believe it."

"He asked for you."

"What?"

"He asked for you, really did."

"You don't have any dog."

"Yes, we do." Jane and another girl came up and joined them. They agreed, "We have a dog hidden. Want to see it?" Nerissa did, much, but was suspicious. She nodded no. "Don't care about the dog."

"We really have one." Then he added, "We're going to see it anyway." They started away.

This was too much for Nerissa, she raced toward them. "I'll come."

Their talk was all about the dog, a white terrier with black spots covering its body and a particularly large one on its head.

"The dog is caged in the lot," Jimmy informed Nerissa. When she remained silent, he added, "One of us feeds it mostly every day or so. Maybe you can do it today. Do you have any money for dog food?"

Nerissa still remained quiet.

"Here's a store. We'd better get food or the dog will starve. Jane fed it yesterday, your turn today."

Nerissa asked, "What if I didn't come down? Who would feed it, then?"

"Some days the dog doesn't eat at all." The two girls nodded in agreement, "Nothing at all." Nerissa thought for a moment and then happily, willingly, gave up a dime she carried in her handkerchief.

Armed with an opened can of dog food, the four entered the lot and walked to a ravine-like hole near the corner of the deserted ground, the area partially hidden by scattered bushes and long brown weeds. The sun's weak rays glanced half-heartedly off the dead vegetation and barely touched the spot around the hole, with its top covered by a slat-work made from fruit crates and weighted by large rocks. Inside was the crouching terrier, shivering with either cold or hunger, or both. The dog at first seemed asleep, but, its tail whipping madly, immediately jumped from its earthy nest when it saw the twins. Its black-spotted muzzle poked expectantly through the slats.

Nerissa stopped many feet from the hole. "Can I feed it? I bought the food."

"Sure, go ahead. Wait until I remove the covering."

Nerissa crouched on the cold ground near the joyous animal and grabbed at it as it bounded from the hole. In the confusion she felt its sharp front teeth enter her hand, but hid the pain for fear that someone else would take the food. She grasped the squirming animal as firmly as she could while favoring the hand, which now began to bleed. With the dog wedged between her legs, its body caught in her straining knees, Nerissa pushed the mixture of ground horse meat and grain between its teeth, gingerly withdrawing her hand just before the jaw closed. Slowly, the dog became less tense, and she could relax her tired legs. Soon, the terrier sat quietly, eating voraciously from Nerissa's hand until the can was empty, its dry and caked mouth continuing to work with regularity even after there was nothing to chew.

"I think it's thirsty," Nerissa said, turning for the first time to her companions, who were a few yards away, looking at the ground. Jimmy had several round stones in his hands.

"I said it's thirsty. Its mouth is still full of food. It needs water to swallow. Look how dry its mouth is."

With that, Nerissa rose to her feet and started away, in a vague search for some water. The terrier looked at her, then followed a few feet back.

The first stone missed both Nerissa and the dog, but the second seemed to bounce once before it caught the animal on its front left paw. Its sudden yipe made Nerissa jump around before she was aware of what was happening. Then she saw another stone strike near the dog, grazing under its stomach and smashing flatly into the weeds. Nerissa turned toward the terrier, but it identified the stones with all of the children, and after growling ran from her, limping on its front leg.

Stones began to come faster. Confused and misunderstanding everyone's intentions, Nerissa began to run from the terrier, from the Robinsons, from the entire area. Only once did she look back and that was to see the dog circled by the boy and two girls, all three closing in with stones. Nerissa did not see them let the animal run away as soon as she was out of sight.

Recently, Nerissa had withdrawn completely from the Robinsons. She kept close to the house or sat moodily on the curb, back

turned to their antics. The twins were furious—they felt defeated, as if Nerissa no longer needed them. They taunted her, jumped on her shadow, skipped circles around her, waved their arms in her face. But to no apparent avail. Nerissa, trying to ignore them while missing nothing in her disfavor, went on with her day-dreaming, or played her games alone. The twins, however, would not be dissuaded easily. The idea they developed was intricate, involving much planning and deliberation. It would, they thought, slash to fragments Nerissa's silent opposition.

Two months before the holiday season they became dervishes of motion. Jane was seen carrying out garbage, sweeping the front sidewalk, washing tenement entrances, picking up trash almost as soon as it was dropped. Jimmy was found in and out of the grocer's, swallowed by large packages, running to help overlaid neighbors, taking out ashes, and, finally, hawking magazines on the corner in a strident voice desperate with lack of success. They barely looked at Nerissa during this time, and while she enjoyed their neglect she somehow missed their attention. But their plan matured. It was so simple. And Nerissa helped because she was curious. One day the little moppet Jeanette mentioned the party, she had been asked, had Nerissa an invitation, a big party for the holidays, only the children. Then Betty asked, then Alice, then everyone on the block asked.

Nerissa tried to isolate her hurt within herself. She slept later. She studied her school books. Her manner was hushed, subdued; and her mother was delighted. Her angularity began to soften, to curve away. She walked only certain floor boards, she touched all pointed objects, she skipped every other sidewalk crack; she picked her nose in quiet and solitude. Then, suddenly, the Robinsons became graceful, acrobatic gods pasted in the clouds of her imagination. She dreamed of them every night, she begged for forgiveness, she promised her soul. They stared unseeing, they turned away, and Nerissa, all the while, curved into maturity.

Two days before the Robinson party, Nerissa received an invitation, but from another source. Each year the Stone Foundation gave a party for children, which, while very successful and popular, was limited to the neediest from a carefully selected neighborhood. Nerissa's mother, who did washing and cleaning for a Mrs. Small,

asked her employer, a directress of the Foundation, for an invitation for her child. Excited, animated, but forcing calmness, Nerissa was barely cognizant of her pinched surroundings and ignored her jeering friends, which of course infuriated them, making them the more anxious to taunt her. But even when Jimmy Robinson caught her in the alley, trapped her with his outstretched arms and tried to pee on her shoes; even when his obscene gestures brought a whole new type of attack upon her; even when Jane called her prissy, old maid, finally whore—even then she laughed and escaped without surrendering her dignity or her person. She had been invited to a party.

Her clothes were arranged, brushed, searched for stains: one special dress for all occasions, a hand-me-down from a cousin; her inconsequential hat also from a cousin, which seemed to get smaller, almost to disappear, with each vigorous brushing; her shoes, scuffed and torn, but by assiduous blacking and polishing made to shine brilliantly and to stand all but the closest inspection. Yet beneath her joy and her renewed confidence, Nerissa was repeatedly torn by fleeting fears and suspicions. She vaguely suspected that these strange children, too, would in the course of that afternoon torture her in some new way. Perhaps she was a child who must always submit to the jibes and taunts of others in order to enter into their company. Yes, these new friends might be no different, no better than those she already had. Involved as she was, however, in preparations, she temporarily brushed such cruel and undefined suspicions into the background. Aware of her self-importance, she indulged her gaiety.

Nerissa slowed to a walk as she came through the shadows of deepening darkness. In no hurry now to arrive at her street and hoping to prolong that wonderful afternoon long into the future, she knew the sight of a familiar face would shatter her equanimity and draw a black line across her excitement. She could not tell even her mother everything; for to tell all would be to release too much that was personal and lovely, things that no one, no matter how close, could hope to understand and share. That afternoon was full of wishes and desires fulfilled only as they had been in daydreams. She thought of herself as perpetually arriving at and leaving parties,

winning prizes, gaining new friends, and creating an aura of excitement. With a mind full of personal success, far away in its dreams of love, sympathy, and hope, she suddenly grabbed at her dress and pulled hard when she realized her cotton panties were slipping slowly down her legs. Glancing swiftly around her, Nerissa stepped into the dark and shadowy area between two overhead lights, hesitatingly raised the skirt of her dress and yanked smartly until her panties were snugly adjusted on her slim frame.

As she did so, she carelessly swept the sidewalk with her eyes. She stopped at a long earthworm inching its way along the street, calmly, silently, with long and slow jerks. When Nerissa saw the worm her immediate reaction was to kill, for she disliked its sliminess and crawlingness. Worms somehow obscurely reminded her of people, always people she hated, and to kill the worm was to wash herself spotlessly clean. She suspected it did no good, that worms and people are not really related, but the act of squashing out a worm's life made it easier for her to face the Robinsons each day. Nerissa, crouching down on hands and knees, hovered over the scrawny insect. Clutching the book with her left hand, she pushed the index finger of her right along what she considered to be the worm's head. The worm hesitated in its movement and then stopped completely. It waited for Nerissa to begin torturing it, as if each inferior thing in life expected to be treated thus by the object that held a personal advantage. Nerissa at first did nothing; she looked into distance and held her finger cocked. She became perfectly silent. Around her the evening closed in, the last traces of the afternoon had disappeared many minutes ago; and Nerissa and the worm were framed as a mute tableau against a black and gloomy background. A city picture—the still old houses, a cold and biting winter wind, a small child motionlessly crouched on the sidewalk, and a tense, helpless worm preparing for torture or death. Nerissa felt power, but in the dusky stillness she also felt sympathy. In her present happiness she dimly realized that killing the worm would not in any way affect the Robinson twins. Did she even hate them? Robinsons, worms, city streets—what were they all? Important? She became aware that the worm meant nothing to her and its death would not, could not, help her. Perhaps the worm, too, was coming

from a party or else going to one. She had never before heard of worm parties, but weren't they possible? Perhaps, instead, the worm was bringing food to its family or was looking for food for itself. Nerissa found compassion amidst her sense of power.

The cocked finger threatened and then was withdrawn. The child, nevertheless, remained hovering over the worm, but whereas once as executioner now as protector and helper. Feeling love and a desire to aid the lonely creature, she prodded its back end in the direction it had been going. Pushing slowly, Nerissa hoped to hurry its journey to whatever goal it had in mind, whether home or to where food was to be found or perhaps to a worm party. The worm, however, resisted Nerissa's aid; first it tried to retreat, then it angled toward the curb, and finally it began to move in the opposite direction. Nerissa realized it had no goal. It was a worm going nowhere, perhaps looking for protection, or more likely trying only to survive in a world of giants. Nerissa knew she could not help, gave a final stroke with her finger on the worm's slimy back, and rose to her feet with a full heart.

She was still many blocks from her home when she decided to take a close look at her book. The only prize given at the party, she had won it. But even though the contest had not been one of skill, she still saw herself as a child of great ability and not one of great luck. The contest—simply to guess the number of colored pebbles in a large cardboard carton—she would transform into a spelling bee or a test of reading knowledge in which she had bested children many years older than her own ten years. She would tell the Robinson twins that she had been secretly invited back for the following year; she would recount all the cake and ice cream she had eaten; she would brag of her new friends, many older and taller than she, among them devoted boys who had promised to protect her against her enemies. She remembered Mrs. Stone who handed out the prize. The old woman sat on the dais during the entire proceedings, and when the prize was awarded she rose majestically to make a short speech praising the children's behavior, her words reflecting her pleasure at seeing them mingling and playing happily. She smiled beautifully, warmly, covering each with a cloak of gratitude; her good-natured aspect revealed that they were ful-

filling her expectations as surely as the party fulfilled theirs.

Then she called out Nerissa's name. "Nerissa Morton. ('Will Miss Nerissa Morton please come, please come, Nerissa, please Miss Morton, come Nerissa. . . .') Will Miss Nerissa Morton please come to the stage to receive the annual gift?" And for Nerissa this was a moment of greatness. She melted. Nervously she mounted the stage and approached Mrs. Stone, who smiled encouragingly. Nerissa reached out to receive the book and suddenly found herself clutching the stumpy and decaying body of the old woman. Mrs. Stone petted Nerissa's back and head and smilingly congratulated her. Then the child, in the grasp of compassion and understanding, left the stage and the party dissolved.

A hum of low angry voices came out of the stillness, at first indistinct, then spraying sporadically against the dilapidated apartment entrances and dingy private houses. The intonation was defiled and smutty. The jumbled words smashed into the grey-browed background of filthy window sills, smudged, broken glass, sooty stone fronts, and finally, syllable by syllable, lost themselves in the empty corners and crevices of discarded refuse. The hum became somewhat clearer—two, possibly three, voices full of sarcasm, yet young, very young voices. The girl's, never rising above a low moan, was quickly followed by that of the boy's pitched to strained excitement, both given impetus by strong, and seemingly irrational, animosity. This outbreak was followed by momentary silence, then an abrupt disclaimer by a new voice, a plaint which soon degenerated into loud abuse that tore away decency, disclosing loathing and the spiteful desire to inflict grief. The girl's voice was vulgar and hoarse as it continued in a biting, grating whisper. His, though, maintained its strength, grinding away hatefully, as if to counterpoint her shrill whispers which pierced the night air and enveloped the three dim figures in concentric circles of abuse and degradation.

"Little girl" sounded from the darkness, the voice tight with a rancor that sharply penetrated the two words. Nerissa heard the call. With the book clutched tightly, she peered through the night for the origin of the voice. It was no more than ten feet away, at the side of a sizable structure of stone steps that led into the second

floor of a squalid and tumbling building. A boy and girl, with some object crouching between them, leaned on the stone, eyes troubled, clothing disarranged, with an aspect about them of terror, frustration, and, Nerissa suspected, of hate.

The child stopped hesitatingly. She looked; and they looked. "Did you call my name?" They stared and said nothing. "Did you call? I heard 'Nerissa.'" Nerissa retreated a step. At first, mistaking them for adults, she knew she should run. Their eyes followed her, transfixed her until she became almost motionless, caught her slightest movement, watched her breathe, pinned even her eyelids into stillness. The glint of street lamps caught faint yellow in their eyes. In her confusion, the girl reminded Nerissa of Jane Robinson, vaguely the same pinched nose and prominent mouth; and the boy was Jimmy Robinson, wearing that kind expression which dissembled treachery. But she was unable to see them clearly in the dark, standing as they were in the shadows, their faces and figures masked by the building. In the sudden quiet, his low "little girl" slapped as if shouted. She was puzzled how he knew her, how he had recognized her, why their attitude seemed harsh and critical of her person. She looked down at herself, wondering what was wrong with her appearance. She was still clean, she saw, although wrinkled and sweaty. His voice echoed through her fear.

Nerissa knew something must be amiss. She automatically tried to pull herself into neatness, one hand to her coat, the other to her hat, which unexpectedly tipped when she brushed roughly against it. She was afraid to stoop, they looked at her so strangely while making no attempt to help or thwart her. She bent suddenly to snatch the hat, but in swinging her arm she missed and it fell a few feet away. She reached anxiously into the angle between the steps and the house and cornered the now dusty object, in her excitement grabbing at it wildly. When she straightened, they were still staring.

Nerissa was nagged by the idea that she should run. Bewildered and frightened, she felt these people meant her harm; but it was really the nature of their antagonism that she was unable to understand. Why had they chosen her? Discretion gave way to curiosity and fear. What if he tried to hurt her or drag her away! Suddenly, the boy's face caught the light, only for an instant, but sufficiently

to permit identification. The third child, crouching between, Nerissa did not know. She watched Jimmy Robinson move to the left, trapping her in the angle; to escape she would run at Jane. But when she glanced at the girl's feet, he sensed her intention and gripped her arm. She struggled from his grasp, knocking her head heavily against the stone, and gave up. Where was she? what was she doing? fighting with the Robinsons, trying to escape them? She had warned herself. Her position was hopeless, he had her trapped in the corner. Now, even Jane helped. She held out her arms, not in succour, but to prevent Nerissa from slipping through, and the boy grinned foolishly. Nerissa knew she could do nothing. Her head ringing from the blow against the wall, her skinny legs too unsteady for support, she sat down awkwardly on the book. They looked at her and seemed to relax. She deliberately crossed her legs and gazed straight ahead, trying not to meet their eyes. She waited. The unknown third child was already far down the street, only shoes slapping the pavement in the gloomy distance.

The boy and girl stared at each other and then returned to Nerissa; they were as wavering and undecided as their captive, intrigued by a situation that no one could comprehend no less act upon. Jimmy suddenly swung his foot toward Nerissa's folded legs and without trying to kick her merely grazed the skin. When the foot touched, Nerissa realized it was not a dream; for in a dream you floated, and she was sitting motionless, being struck by someone who might try to injure her. She stared at Jane, who stared back not unsympathetically, but still remote and vaguely uninterested. Neither she nor Jimmy was angry, neither was any longer prodded by resentment. Confusion and bewilderment touched them as much as Nerissa, the embarrassed incertitude of a group in the agony of testing attitudes and decisions. Nerissa resigned herself to the cold ground. The four legs before her seemed larger than human legs; stiffened against the evening air they resembled prison bars that extend around and over a helpless animal. Sightless faces hung above the bars, faces that want to ignore and yet comprehend the object at their disposal.

Nerissa cried quietly, a combination of loneliness, fear, and a desire for sympathy, a hopeless weeping which released nothing

from her heart and only abashed and shamed her in the eyes of these persistent antagonists. She secretly hoped her tears would soften Jane, and she furtively glanced up to see what affect if any she had. They gazed past her, as if undecided what to do, evidently wondering why they had stopped her; her presence was an unknown quantity—perhaps, she thought, they wanted to kiss her. She would like that: she would let them.

A broken street light brought out the strange formation of grotesque shadows on the building fronts, shadows that changed from people to abstract figures and back again in a never-ending variety of inventions. In the stillness, a single pigeon landed nearby and trotted in a semi-circle, glaring and clucking at Nerissa. In its perky pride it seemed to mock the inert child. She somehow felt her own inferiority, recognized the pigeon's range and freedom of distance, and this knowledge infuriated her. She angrily reached for its legs, but the cocky bird triumphantly trotted out of range at the last moment. Once again it crawled in near Nerissa's legs, skillfully jumped away from the outstretched grasping fingers that crooked the air wrathfully, clucked sharply, and then in ever-increasing circles ran far down the street. Nerissa looked after it until brindled shadows assimilated the small hopping body.

A steady tic began in Nerissa's temple, as if the pulse were trying to jump out to escape this predicament, unaware that the body must remain and suffer punishment. She pressed her finger to the tic and felt it vibrate so strongly that she was sure the twins heard the pounding. She did not want to appear weak, first the tears and then the tic; but they seemed to notice nothing. She pushed against the tic with all her strength, both arms strained to her temple. Awkwardly she bent her head to hide the action. The tic weakened, flattened out, stopped: and then she felt it on the other side. She moved her arms to push as hard as she could. Before it could shift sides again she put one hand at each temple and pressed. It suddenly stopped and there was desert silence. The three looked at each other, the child on the ground, sitting on a book, and the uncertain twins towering above, preventing her escape.

The Robinsons began to sway slightly; their discomfort was evident, and Nerissa felt it was directed more toward themselves

than her. They did not want responsibility; they would neither protect nor injure her; and they had no notion how to act. Nerissa hugged the idea that her presence had made a difference, that they now respected her and wanted her friendship without having the means to express their feelings. Nerissa suddenly felt warm and sympathetic; she hoped they would embrace her, for she wanted to return their love. The cold of the night became less biting, the ground less hard. She slowly and unsurely extended her arms toward them, one to each side, cross-like, freely offering her tenderness; but the gesture was unheeded. She vaguely suspected they would not know how to communicate, although a reciprocal gesture of friendship was probably foremost in their minds. They too wanted tenderness and were unable to obtain it. Nerissa understood the situation; she wanted to help once she recognized their discomfort. They could not express themselves, but she who had just won a prize and been praised by Mrs. Stone—she knew how to express love, how to extend herself and reach into other people. Nerissa knew now that the Robinsons did not manifest hate, but disguised their true feelings in order to test her. She knew now that cruelty and ill feeling were only masks so that people would not have to reveal themselves. It was all a matter of coming to them and assuring them that their true feelings should prevail. Nerissa was so sure of this she wanted to act, to reach these stiffened children standing defiantly across from her. She again extended both arms straight out, like a sitting somnambulist, and tried to brush their legs. By touching them, she would make them forfeit their vanity. But they were unaware; they failed to see her in her new role, they wanted to see only the old Nerissa who was dirty and tired and frightened. She felt her finger brush Jane's leg, and then her eyes were startled by a look compounded of fear, agitation, and complete joylessness. The girl could not be touched, Nerissa really disgusted her; her, Jane's, situation was one of painful circumstances that was not to be allayed by reciprocated love. Suddenly she walked off and Jimmy, following slowly behind, trailed away into the night that had unexpectedly engulfed Nerissa and all her newly-discovered joy.

Immediately the street was deserted. Nerissa remained in the corner unaware that the twins had departed. Their bodies, their

shadows, their strident voices had gone, leaving her sitting on the book confused and alone. It was cold. The silence struck her, brought her back to herself.

She looked into the street from the angle between the stone walls. It was darker, the wind more biting, but otherwise the same as before. She had her book, her memories of the party, her stories to tell, her hopes for the next year. These twins meant nothing to her. They were older and larger children that she should not try to understand. What could they mean to her? They really hadn't hurt her person or even taken her book. She would forget them, push them away, and think only of that afternoon and of her short-lived but memorable happiness.

Nerissa rose to a kneeling position, taking care that her coat should not slice through the dirt in the corner. She stood, straightening her clothes, rubbing her hands clean against each other. Then she picked up the book. She walked slowly along the street, unsure now of what to do, whether to tell everything at home or to forget the Robinsons completely. They recurred in her mind until even the party was forgotten. Why had they molested her? What had they wanted? Why her? She heard Nerissa called, she heard Nerissa Morton, saw the old woman at the party, saw the shadows on the street, saw the Robinson twins, heard her mother call Nerissa, felt herself in dark alleys, in corners, evading people who attacked her, heard child-Nerissa, Nerissa-child, "Little girl," saw Jimmy's foot approach her leg, heard Nerissa Morton announced as winner, saw the twins laughing at her, danced, ate cake and candy, and played games with her new friends who perhaps accepted her, saw Jane's distressed expression, felt hate surrounding and provoking her in every street, in the house, in all people she met.

She turned the corner and then, not ten feet away, saw the pigeon struggling. It flopped back and forth on the sidewalk, unable to attain any stability or direction. It looked at Nerissa with a glance both of fear and supplication. Its wing was injured where the car had nudged it. Nerissa came closer and stared oddly at the bird. She stopped two feet away, transfixed, motionless. The bird looked back, struggling and flopping. Suddenly, Nerissa swung her foot and with all her strength kicked the pigeon full on the breast. It

gave a quick cluck as it arched into the curb, settling awkwardly and flatly. Then it lay still. The small skinny child with brightly shining eyes turned away, shrieking down the street toward her home, no longer afraid, no longer alone. And then it raced fleetingly through her mind that she should have killed that worm, crushed it, stamped it out of existence, as she had done to the pigeon. Now she knew.

The towering buildings slapped fine dust into the chill evening.

Lyric

GIL ORLOVITZ

Say of the noon, ghost gold,
walked with a bated glitter;
a green eye awash in the sun,
not spring, no, nor winter.

Not summer nor fall
said of a chill to lustre;
rather, midday in a mood—
transparent short of shudder.

Say of the noon, ghost gold,
passed this way without injury
from morning to dusk,
only to go down in mystery.

Some Autobiographical Words

GIL ORLOVITZ

TO START WITH, the autobiographer is a born solipsist, an event in my circumstance that took place at Philadelphia; of a father whose extensive memory of the Talmud could and did admonish me on the relative finality of humanity and art; and of a mother who was satisfied that I could have some winnings based on a childhood of babble, lox and love. I developed, logically, into a healthy concentric, but acquired an English teacher who frowned me into a German treatise on prosody which I mused on during chemistry, whose docent was equable simply to my *doppelganger's* presence in class. The balance of adolescence hung on innumerable coffees at a downtown Philadelphia cafeteria, since demolished, where I had been preceded by some aging contributors to *transition*. Thus cased, I dozed through a semester of dramaturgy at Columbia University under Hatcher Hughes; caught four years of the Air Corps during World War II; and brought myself into a valuable rough at the Dramatic Workshop in New York, to which Erwin Piscator had condescended, a man whose intimacy with the theatre in all its norms and abnorms I have nowhere seen equalled. Survival called and, irresistably, I found havens in radio monitoring, export-import, and researching for Standard Oil of New Jersey. After three off-Broadway productions of my plays, Columbia Pictures nudged me into staff-screenwriting; but I have since nudged off into free-lance television, in which the burdens are sometimes shared by my actress-singer wife, Lynn Marquize, and my ten-year-old daughter. All of us now live modestly in Hollywood, not really too difficult a feat if one believes in the relative finality of humanity and art.

Four major projects in poetry and one in fiction presently engage my work; each is thoroughly committed to metaphor as a mode, and paradox as a fulfillment, of the author's desire to display phenomena at their least vulnerable, which is to say at their most

commonplace; their unruly pluralism, then, resolves into a ridiculed unified field theory contained in the sensuous proof of experience through the word.

The poetry projects are: *The Diary of Matthew Parson*, *M'sieu Mishiga*, *The Letters of Great Ape*, and the *Art of the Sonnet*.

The *Parson* work is essentially what its title implies: the construction of the personality of an ordained American minister ruminating upon religious attitudes not confined to any one sect, and exercising upon them a wit at some expense to dogma, and altogether at the expense of himself. Since the assumption is made that religious attitudes are a legitimate concern of ontology, a search is conducted as to their reality in the context of the contemporary American scene.

M'sieu Mishiga predicates a psychiatrically non-classifiable lunacy on the part of its hero; with this operating attribute, the major principles of sanity, as our *zeitgeist* has them, are put to test and protest.

In *The Letters of Great Ape*, however, satirical provocation is founded on a somewhat less than human note. The conceit is posited that literacy tests have been more than ably negotiated on the lower animal level, and that a superior member of this class, at some residential distance from his superior genus but provisionally accepted therein, expresses himself at length in correspondence with typical representatives of the human society, whose replies the author sees fit to withhold. Once again, from another vantage, the effort is made to crack the substance of the self-made image and to expose the ruthless comedy of the living parallax.

These biographical masques belong to a plan which I inaugurated in *The Diary of Dr. Eric Zeno* and continued in *The Diary of Alexander Patience* and *Professor Bold*; wherein, successively, the errant ganglia of a Western Christian psychoanalyst, a self-confessed but unreliable stoic, and a somewhat rococco academician are brought to book.

A considerably older design involves the *Art of the Sonnet* series, with eighty-four sonnets completed. Within the fourteen-line frame I am attempting to explore prosodic innovation without violating the organic necessity of the poet's metaphorical obligations.

The work in fiction provisionally entitled *Now*, has for its initiating and autonomous section the volume *Ice Never F*. It has always seemed to me that the offense in depth cannot be avoided if the artist means to cope both with the evolution of the novel form and his fundamental astonishment at the multiplicity of being. In this instance the offense in depth is a specific strategy employed to educate a protagonist in the ramifications of the paradoxes of apparently commonplace phenomena. Logically, then, at any given point, the characteristics of the protagonist can assume those of any other created personality in the novel, or groups of personalities, just as theirs can take on his. With equal validity, the chronologic age of the characters are subject to a behavioral age in a given experience, so that at no stage is there a time specification. We are then engrossed by the created present, and cannot be accused of historical distortion. In such a created present, the experiences of a given number of characters (whose locale is that of Philadelphia), impinging one upon the other singly and by groups, their experiences in the milieu of conventional time-sequence transpiring at widely separate intervals in their lives, are in parallel and interlocking analogic action by reason of emotional, intellectual and social congruencies.

On the completion of the novel, I will resume (given sufficient phylogenetic grace) the dramaturgic incursions into American historical mythmen, of which Gray is the fillip. I will be deeply touched if the American theatre shall at last find itself temperamentally equiposed to mount them.

GIL ORLOVITZ
Drawing by his wife
Lynn Marquize



Lynn
Marquize

Poems by Gil Orlovitz

Diary of Matthew Parson—4

Between the palm trees rattling their venetian slats
in a wind giving no quarter by being from none,
and a fraternal order quarter moon left
by a secret society, I cannot openly pray
tonight; and I will not rely on Sunday sermons
for the week. I have no Adversary of my own.
Evils are rented, leased and temporarily
installed; and Good a vague promissory to pay.
I begged both architect and congregation
that spaces be left in the church for gargoyles;
outside the church, then, I said, if you must
be traditional;— it was no on both mounts:
there can exist no trophies of anonymity.
And, having something of a craggy
face, I held my tongue. One must hold
something. If not dearly: cheaply; if not
cheaply: merely; if not merely: sleepily;
if not sleepily: then dumbly, by God, for speechless
possession must count to a Saint Chances of
this world, to whom scientists bear but a countdown rosary.
I inquired: rather than wine, why not a cup
of liquid oxygen? Rather than Christ, why not
a rocket on the Cross? Rather than
the recognizable Holy Family and accoutrements,
why not Miro Fish, Mary Modigliani,
and Divinity Cubes dissolving on a Guitar
Crucifix? Will we be less devout to sing
our hymns on a twelve-tone scale? But
you are not ordained to wear your cranium backward,
the vestrymen replied. The parish garden smells
me secretly: I may be a ghostly compost on

this earth. To hold one's nose as well,
 unaware of the odor's source, is to be as human
 as the next one, more so if his is held
 more tightly. I will pray, perhaps, in a mutilated
 way: that the wind blow quarterly; that the moon
 give womanly orders; that the palm leaves seduce
 the cobra spine. And I may be half-inclined
 to listen to myself with half an ear, the net
 effect more silken than we usually suppose.

M'Sieu Mishiga—3

ogled by bloodshot oranges,

I am committed.

I have a few Proclamations for the Ages—

as, we run for our hives from the uniformed coprophages,

I am committed.

What slangy eyes,

what slipknot hips,

what

brings you here inquisitors hours are over:

quidditors:

it will be asked of you are you a mammal,

say youre a horizontal hunchback called a camel, and

see what they say, and—

say what they see, oh—

say can you see, by—

the fauns early light that youre

committed and goggled with bloodshot oranges.

What thug of your dreams holds you up?

it will be asked of you,

when are the Festivals of Fickle,

how green is your pickle,

but tell them you have some Proclamations for the Ages—

as, toss a bone to Old Rover Archaeologist,

social acceptance; citizenship, perhaps,
conferred by the human group who call
us static revolutionaries—
reacting, as you may say, to
our innate Reserve Officer status.
But, I beg you, remember that even
when we swung our sorties tree
to tree, we kept our heads by tails,
balancing what went before with what
might come to be, whilst our cousins,
who seem a little awkward at
reunion and insist on too much small
talk, too habitually scan
themselves in hairless mirrors, confusing
nakedness with destiny. I fear
that war, my son, is fought above
the forest now in the rootless candor
of atoms making childish faces
at each other, and men confessing
to their caricatures. And while, my son,
it is true that men ask pity
of all the animals, pity cannot
make the human problems the apes'.
There is some merit, after all,
in surviving as the son of the Great
Ape, rather than risking your all
on a throw of snobbery, which got us where
we are, I do admit, but no
further: aristocracy nullifies
assumptions. I should be griefstricken
to lose you as you are; but fathers
are utterly damned if they must lose
sons to what they're not. Will
you think on this a little? a little
more on me? and much more
on your youth, of which there is
so much, I know, you hardly know

where to begin to age.— Will
 you be bringing guests for Merry
 Linkmas? All of us miss you at
 the Thirsting Pool where, happily,
 we never learned to look down
 at ourselves, but only drink our absences.
 Study diligently: we are not given
 many scholarships. Aff'c't'ly, Your Father.

Art of the Sonnet—XXCII

The livid marks of old resurrections
 run down his neck and arms:
 I have been back and forth, to and fro;
 I return many times, much god to go.
 Tattooed with transparent burials,
 carbons taken at the faintest task of love,
 his flesh at last a copy,
 children put down arms in the sockets of his bones:
 I have been back and forth, to and fro;
 I return many times in my double-dealing
 but single cross, drunk on my intermediacy.
 Men sober him up for the executions,
 but never enough for the god, who makes him go back,
 to and fro, till he be but a word between the two.

The Morning of a Clown

Tardrizzling heat, the skin sticks to the ghosts,
 the moguls of an oil sky; the orchids
 ogle the ripple of excreting insects.
 A bleak ripe, mottled with the black slurring of sarcophagi.

The shadows gulp gold; a green paste in transparent
fur masticates cyanic syrup
in the lazy flarefalls of cymbals,
the meridian slopping down to dew,
my mask overpulped with mass morning
myrhh, bitter to the chaste chickle of the gum
running eye. I am too azure, too venomous
with the dactylic thrombi of rumpling slumber
to wax the alarm of laughter that floods
its own metal with gushing goitre. I
am the teased of the Clowns, and will relish roast
pompons and the marshmallow mist before I turn
informer on tragedy: she whispers odium
to the earth, while I stroke the groin of moss,
the jellyclad cougars, the gemsmeared
decibels in their scoriae of maggoted hum,
and the wounded scotomata burying the dazzles
they had hissed off the sloeeyed horizon.
The ripples in orangutan headdress are barely
resonant of the pools they come to drink
their mica from, and the flora of my recumbency
are ritual rapids in glossy senility.
My mouth slides off into plastopleistocene
flying lyres, and denuded tree trunks
in postures of exotic celibacy. The windless
resin tallows over the glassbottomed throat
of the moon, and I shall not shallow
saturation where lecherous echo glows
in mapleleaf manta under my tongue.
In such inverted dusk teething
through the morning, I cannot hear the castanets
of myelin, flamencoed on the sugarcones.

Gray*

*A play in thirty-nine scenes based in part on some of the events
in the life of Abraham Lincoln.*

GIL ORLOVITZ

SCENE I

(Enter CARL and SUSAN LOCKWOOD from LEFT, walking slowly. They are quite old. They halt, obviously tired.)

CARL. I'd rather visit neighbors than God on a Sunday.

SUSAN. I guess the land has plenty of both. *(Looking round her.)*
Sometimes, I think, I could pick the twilight like flowers.

CARL *(puts an arm about her shoulders)*. I wonder how many
in Kentucky go to church to visit neighbors, having never found
God at home.

SUSAN. I wonder who the black people find.

CARL. It may not be their country, Susan. And we're old enough
to be their concern, not they ours.

SUSAN. Young pain deserves more concern than old discomfort.

CARL. Color makes slaves of us all, as—green with envy.

SUSAN. I think you'd better put an arm about yourself, Carl.

CARL. Well, I expected the autumn air to sass our bones, and
our bones thrash the scamping gusts, making a round racket in our
flat age.

SUSAN. You men ask too much of the woman in you! *(He
laughs delightedly.)*

CARL. I will do without the autumn air this season, because of
love.

*Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *Gray*, being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada and all other countries of the International Copyright Union, is subject to a royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio or television broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer who may wish to quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper. All inquiries should be addressed to the author.

SUSAN. But not without your supper, Carl. I've picked enough flowers. Come.

(*They start to EXIT when ABE GRAY, a tall rawboned man, ENTERS LEFT and calls after them.*)

ABE. Are you the Lockwoods? I was told I might find you walking home.

CARL. That's our name.

ABE. Mine's Abe Gray. I was told you might've known my mother and father, and where their graves might be.

SUSAN. Laura and William Gray?

(*ABE nods.*)

SUSAN. How they've grown into you.

CARL. If I'd a son, I'd want him brief at my burial, but hearing me out in his bones, with all my due respect to his deafness from his own earslant at things. Get back to your territory, Abe.

ABE. I'll be brief, Mr. Lockwood, once I bury them. Show me their graves.

CARL (*with irritation, to Susan*). This man has a headstone around his neck, and puts it atop his skull sometimes for the weighty, formal occasions too much for his heart, like a black plug hat, and makes his brains bowlegged. I'm hungry.

(*CARL takes his wife's arm, intending to lead her off, but ABE lightly interposes himself.*)

ABE (*lightly*). And I'm lost.

CARL. When young we get younger in the dark, fireflies in the blood. But now—

ABE (*interrupting*). There should be a path you could direct me to.

SUSAN. Young man, we've forgotten the path—

ABE (*harshly*). And remember only the future. Yes.

SUSAN. And we cannot remember anywhere their dead bodies might lie.

CARL. We are too close to our own: charity-memory begins at home. Will you let us go, Mr. Gray?

ABE. What did they die of?

SUSAN. Milk-sickness. It took many that year. First the tongue became white and then the face dark.

ABE. You recall them well enough alive.

CARL. Yes. Will you challenge that?

ABE. No.

CARL. Enough?

ABE. No. I must mark them.

CARL. Why? Haven't they marked you?

ABE. They let me go.

SUSAN. For your sake. They could not instruct the land. It remembered few crops for them.

ABE. What was my father like?

CARL. William Gray? Well, sir, his black hair grew out of his eyes—

ABE (*interrupting*). I will not take jests on my father—

CARL. You had better, sir, else you make of him a monument and yourself its keeper fending off all your imagined fatherless all your life. I say his black hair grew out of his eyes: they were dishevelled, and looked on a great unkempt nose. He was a pioneer who broke ground, that the ground might at last break him. He was an enemy of the unknown, but, discovering it, he would keep it unknown to everyone but himself: in death, sir, he succeeded, but he need not have died so hard. There's an irony none of us know.

ABE. Was he kind?

SUSAN (*gently*). He let you go.

ABE. And my mother, madame?

SUSAN. She sang songs to recommend your sleep, and cuffed you if you looked on danger as a toy.

ABE. No more?

SUSAN. Is there more?

ABE. A prevailing air that a human has, such as that perhaps which finds a home at a windmill, or prefers old birdwings pasturing in clouds, or slyly glides through a flute. Which was she?

SUSAN. None of those. Laura Gray was an air that kept its finger to its lips. You will see her if you hush.

ABE (*shaking his head; very quietly*). I cannot, madame. Not yet. Not yet.

CARL (*trying to guide SUSAN past ABE*). We're done with your

mother and father, Abe. Our own children wait for us.

ABE. You will survive, Mr. Lockwood, in familiarity's arrogance. If you become lost, they will find you with guilt's search-warrant. Since I will never return, I will keep you here as long as I like.

CARL. A recipe for immortality, perhaps?

ABE. Yes, if the desire held; but there is enough of repetition in infinite variety to obscure change. Then, tenacity is soon enough tamed to trust, trust to slumber—and we cannot even wake to find our guarded life gone. I only want to know if either Laura or William Gray spoke of me before they died.

(There is a pause. CARL turns away, trembling.)

ABE *(to CARL)*. I'm sorry if the air's too waspish.

CARL. I think, sir, I could handle that.

ABE. Well, then?

CARL. I did not see them die.

ABE. Why not? Weren't you their friends?

CARL. That day I had friends in town.

ABE. There was a town then?

CARL. Enough to visit.

ABE. I would have burnt it to have had you with Laura and William.

CARL. To have had them speak to me of you?

ABE. Yes. Don't I deserve some ego on my parents' deathbed?

SUSAN. There is enough for a man at his birthbed.

ABE. I cannot think so.

SUSAN. Then I may pity you.

ABE. You may, madame. Sometimes I think I can't have enough of pity; and other times when I would destroy pity altogether from the world, both toward myself and all men.

SUSAN. Do you pity others when you feel it for yourself?

ABE. Yes, madame, if I'm in their company; alone, in that state, I see no other men at all. Madame—*(with difficulty)* were you at my mother and father's side when they finished?

SUSAN *(after a pause)*. Yes.

ABE. And did they speak of me?

SUSAN. If they did, I did not hear them.

ABE. How close were you?

CARL. I won't have your emotions abruptly at her—

ABE. She will, sir.

SUSAN. Close, Abe.

ABE. How long?

SUSAN. Two days.

ABE. And no word of me?

SUSAN. None.

ABE. Did you sleep?

SUSAN. Yes. But only when they slept.

(ABE slowly backs away from them. SUSAN and CARL stare at him with overwhelming compassion. The length of the stage now separates them.)

ABE (in a very remote voice). They might have dreamed. Is that not possible?

SUSAN. Yes.

ABE. And could they not have dreamed—of me?

SUSAN. They could have.

ABE (in an odd voice). Thank you.

(He EXITS. SUSAN and CARL stand looking after him as the lights DIM OUT.)

SCENE 2

(A corner of the stage. ENTER ABE, alone.)

ABE (hardly audible). From the name to the man is a society. My name is Abe Gray. (loudly; grinning, embarrassed) Forget the name: it will make all things simpler. But forgetting at first wants recognition: Abe Gray! The crude moment need not be the handsome hour. My homespun unconscious, I submit, is not these files of white and black that should be twisted into some ornate and conscious conflict empowered with days and nights and years, time's delicate brutality. (slaps his thigh) Abe is Abe! An ungainly lad who reads a gnarled thought by a gnarled tree at a gnarled brook, who in a wrestling spree with a man of matched muscle might bawl what sinew is an offender? What, when the brawl is not the buzzard to settle on a carcass, but a skirl of skill. Friends, eh? Though I'll sick a doctrine from a stump on a scamp

of listening men, I need no greater legislation of my self-esteem than assembled joy. (*roaring at audience*) Turn back! (*muttering*) It's a clear matter: I want to be satisfied with what I am. But if what I am is forever what I will be, then my satisfaction loiters against its will, and my own lechery for history makes me a liar. (*shouting*) Make me out an anonymous liar! Damn identification! Note my name but dare not connote it! (*gesturing toward the darkness*) Will you slave me to these men?

(*His shoulders are suddenly tired, and he walks slowly toward EXIT.*)

ABE (*muttering*). Put a bullet through their brains. Not mine. Eh? (*He EXITS.*)

SCENE 3

(*Townspeople, both men and women, stand in a circle around ABE and BILL SHUCK, who are both stripped to the waist. BILL is crouching, ABE stands straight; both are breathing hard. SAM PAGE, refereeing, has his arm up.*)

SAM. Best of three falls, this decides. You ready, Abe?

ABE. Ready.

SAM. Bill?

BILL. Sure.

SAM. All right.

(*He brings his arm down, and the combatants slowly circle around each other. ANN HATCHER, a girl in the crowd, watches ABE admiringly.*)

BILL. Now's the time for your surveyin' to come in handy, Abe! (*The crowd laughs delightedly.*)

ABE (*grinning*). You aiming to settle down, Bill?

(*The crowd roars.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE (*laughing and yelling*). —Split his rail, Abe!

—Come on, Bill, don't jump him—he's so tall you'd have to climb down!

—Watch out for his knees, Bill—they're knockin' so much they're liable to crack any bone comin' between!

—Be careful of Bill's skull now, Abe, he crows it up like a rooster at dawn!

—One slightly used silver dollar says Abe Gray takes the match!

—One all-used silver dollar down on Bill Shuck!

SAM (*to the combatants*). Mix it up, boys—I don't wantt die standin' up in this hole I'm diggin'!

BILL (*to ABE*). Come on closer—I'm not used to lookin' like you at things through that surveyin' telescope.

ABE. If I come any closer you'll have to wrestle backwards. You remind me of a little story I once heard—

TOWNSPEOPLE. —After the rassle, Abe! Won't be able to tell who wins or loses if you tell that story!

ABE. Just told it. Bill here reminds me of a little story I once heard—!

BILL. Abe, if I couldn't lick you, I'd kill ya!

ABE (*roaring*). I'll quit now, Bill, if I can save your soul!

SAM (*howling frustratedly*). Get in there an' rassle or I call this a draw—

ABE (*to BILL*). If we could get that referee Sam Page beside himself enough, we could sit down and watch *them*!

TOWNSPEOPLE. —Quit practicin' for the legislature, Abe!

—Maybe if you use that fist of yours for a gavel, Bill, Abe's mouth'll sit down!

—About the only blood I can see is my own fingers scratchin' for a fight!

—Give 'em room!

—They got enough room now to set up housekeepin'!

—Can't tell they're man and wife though, they're so friendly!

—Beggin' pardon of any ladies in the crowd, but that Abe an' Bill'll just have to adopt a kid 'cause it don't look like they'll ever get together!

(The crowd bellows with laughter; and the female element, fraudulently turning away for the moment, can't help but giggle too. BILL suddenly makes a dive for ABE's waist, and ABE catches him by the hands. For a moment they sway back and forth, seeking to upset the balance. BILL finally forces ABE down on one knee and manages a headlock which ABE breaks by hurling BILL over his head and then pouncing on him. They are down on the ground now, rolling over and over, each alternating in advantage.)

TOWNSPEOPLE (*yelling, squealing, rooting, shouting*). —Crack his rib, Abe—that'll send him home to Eve!

—Abe ain't got no tail, Bill, so you jus' stick that long nose of his between his legs!

—Knock out his navel, Abe—an' he'll go bawlin' back to mama!

(BILL pins one of ABE's shoulders, and the crowd is stricken quiet. ANN presses forward through the crowd, a little worried. ABE grunts, breathing roughly, as he strives to shake BILL off.)

ANN (*as she reaches the inner circle*). That's no way to look at tomorrow, Mister Gray.

ABE (*through his grunts*). If that's you, Miss Hatcher, I will concede I can look at tomorrow with more modesty than my current position allows me, but Bill here insists on my immorality!

(*Appreciative laughter from the townspeople.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE. —I'll vote for any man that can keep his head—upside down—and that's Abe Gray!

—Just let Abe *walk* down the Sangamon River and it'll make itself more navigable out of plumb shame!

ANN. Mister Gray—

ABE (*with difficulty*). Yes, ma'am?

ANN. You are confusing a woman with your future. Is that how you court danger?

TOWNSPEOPLE (*laughing*). —It's downright unfair for Abe to be rasslin' two people all at the same time!

—Better decide quick, Abe Gray!

(ABE finally manages a scissors around BILL and squeezes. BILL lets out a roar of agony and ABE flips him over, springs on him and jams his shoulders down. The crowd yells, SAM raises his arm.)

SAM. Abe Gray—winner—two out of three!

(ABE bounds up, grinning widely, and pulls BILL up who is the first to pound his back with congratulations. The townspeople mill around to shake ABE's hand and thump his back. ABE, towering above everyone, yells gleefully over to ANN:)

ABE. Your modest servant, Miss Hatcher!

TOWNSPEOPLE (*pulling ABE along*). —Come on Abe, we'll stand you to a couple jugs of hard cider—

—You been sober long enough, Abe—

—Why, one sober man in a passel of pluperfect drunks can make them feel lonelier than if each one was all by himself—

ABE (*bellowing*). Now you got to decide if you want me to go to the capitol hard-drinkin' or hard-thinkin'!

(ANN *stands by herself as the rest of the townspeople are about to hustle and jostle ABE away.*)

ANN (*calling out to Abe*). You always have a knack of making tomorrow today, Mister Gray?

ABE (*calling back*). Miss Hatcher—

ANN. Well, sir?—

ABE. I run knack-and-knack with it!

(*The crowd groans and laughs as ABE EXITS with them, and ANN waves gaily after him, alone onstage, as the LIGHTS DIM OUT.*)

SCENE 4

(*A corner of the stage. ABE is whittling a piece of wood, and whistling a tune offkey. ENTER TOM KNIGHT, a physician and close friend.*)

TOM. Thought I might find you by the creek.

ABE. Sit down, Tom, and whittle awhile.

TOM. You're due at the Legislature tomorrow, the folks are waiting to give you a send-off—and here you are.

ABE. This creek here is so shy it pulls autumn leaves over it and runs underneath.

TOM. That a fact?

ABE. As near to a human being as a fact can get. I thought facts creep in you for shelter and sustenance; and when they're wounded, you being a physician, they request you bind up their bleeding logic— Whittle awhile.

TOM. I should attend my patients.

ABE. You can make me one if you've too much of a conscience. Do you treat the conscience, Tom?

TOM. Where is it?

ABE. I'm whittling one. Isn't that what I should do? One of the citizens yelled I had been sober long enough. Now, Tom—

what's sober?

TOM. Why, sobriety may be likened to insanity. It signifies: clear-headedness, clear-heartedness, clear-genitaledness. More: constant sobriety indicates constant terror. Are you afraid, Abe?

ABE. Of nothing.

TOM. You are subject, then, to spells of intense courage?

ABE. No.

TOM. What are you subject to?

ABE. Myself.

TOM. At all times?

ABE. Especially when I'm surrounded by others. Men are my symptoms.

TOM. The symptoms are expecting you.

ABE. I think they can wait.

TOM. The symptoms elected you.

ABE. I say they can wait. I'll never be cured of them.—Whittle with me, Tom. Do you think a gigantic force could sit down and whittle with a man, quietly?

TOM. No.

ABE. A small force, perhaps. An elf of energy.

TOM. But that wouldn't satisfy you, would it?—Do you want to be cured of men?

ABE. Could they be cured of me?

TOM. Do you afflict them?

ABE. I make them laugh, and promise them laws that would help them.

TOM. Yes: they afflict you.

ABE. Go to your patients. Or you will be one of mine.

TOM. Can you remember now that I am your friend?

ABE. I can have no friends; only lovers.

TOM. Is Ann?

ABE. Is she sick? I'm sick of the sickly. Look, man—it is forever a frontier world. I'll love no woman that extracts only whiteness from the sun.

(He breaks out into sardonic laughter.)

ABE. I want a woman who will bear children even when the wolves are howling outside the womb!

TOM. Did your mother?

ABE. There's always too much palaver on mothers. As a foetus, I took that into consideration, and decided against having one.

TOM. Ann.

ABE. Ann— Ann— what of this Annanonymous Ann?

TOM. Simply that she loves you.

ABE. Much too simple.

TOM. She wants you.

ABE. Much too simple. I have men to caucus with, and to committee with, and to cry Aye with and Nay with, and to debate if the rivers be widened and deepened, and if the capitol of men be changed from this city or to that city, or to heaven itself, if the clouds will tolerate dense smoking-rooms and the angels coughing amid their choirs, or to hell if it be not already too slummed with our capitols; I have men to ride with, and make mock of, and be in reverence to if any among them have not grovelled before the spastic early morning hours that dribble out of men's mouths in webby nervous-systems which refuse to lie abed on the human bellies. I have men, I say, for all the functions, to listen to me or to rake issue, as they are bidden or bored or baffled. What's Ann? What's love?

TOM. Whittle.

(The lights dim rapidly.)

SCENE 5

(On one side of the stage, a CROWD of men and women, all ages, all colors, arranged in tiers. ENTER ABE from the opposite side of the stage, where he halts. Between ABE and the CROWD is the feeling of an immense gulf. Those who will ask ABE questions will be referred to simply as A MAN or as A WOMAN; but they will be many and various. The questions and answers proceed at a very rapid tempo.)

ABE. Begin.

A MAN. What's begin?

ABE. Ask a woman.

A WOMAN. Define a nation.

ABE. That's your business, not mine.

A WOMAN. Why weren't you satisfied with a single term in

the legislature?

ABE. Would you be satisfied with a politician who would've been?

A MAN. What is the United States of America?

ABE. England's only child. Spoiled, spendthrift— it'll make friends with anybody, but arrogantly. The only country that treats God as an equal—who but a child would dare? We make slaves of ancient civilizations—who but a child would dare? We amass fortunes and hide them as toys—but we will give those toys away. Toyless, we tantrum down the forests—but did you ever hear of us lynching Paul Bunyan?

A MAN. Who's Paul Bunyan?

ABE. None of your business!

A WOMAN. Isn't everything our business?

ABE. Only at election-time, and then it's show-business!

A WOMAN. Are you strong, Abe?

ABE. For men or women? Depends who's asking.

A MAN. Will you live long, Abe Gray? Will you die in office?

ABE. Keep electing me and I'll have to die in office.

A WOMAN. You honest?

ABE. If I lie about my honesty, that may make me no more than modest; if modest, I may never be able to admit the truth, and therefore lie, but be more honest in necessity than the grandest truth-monger. I may be dishonest some times to hurt you less and honor myself more, in which case that could be a matter for preening my self-esteem as not. I will tell you this, that I will steal from you only at my expense, and let you stipulate the repayment I must answer to; and understand I shall not steal the specie from your pockets, but the desperately rubbed coins of yourselves, your daughters and your sons. In short, I am mad enough to lead you, if you will enjoy relief of your own madness sanctioned by mine.

A MAN. Do you like words too much?

ABE. Say: not enough! There are not enough words for me to seize and hide you!

A WOMAN. What's democracy?

ABE. Small skills, madame.

A MAN. Is half a nation better than none?

ABE. Which half?

A MAN. Are you sane?

ABE. As God is my judge or man?

A WOMAN. Do you believe in God?

ABE. There are no atheists in public office.

A MAN. She asked if you believed in God!

ABE. Ask of Heaven if it believes in men! As some countries are godless, is Heaven manless? I want a reciprocal trade-agreement!

A MAN AND A WOMAN. Do you believe in God?

ABE. Will He deliver the Third Precinct? By how many votes?

A WOMAN. Do you hate or love your enemies?

ABE. I intend, madame, to bear a cross made of the lightest possible metal.

A WOMAN. Do you fancy yourself a backwoods Christ?

ABE. As much as my mother was a backwoods Mary.

(A SMALL BOY, about eleven years old, detaches himself from the top tier of the CROWD, and begins to force a descent. At each successive level he momentarily stops to shout a question at ABE, but his voice is drowned out by the others, and so he continues downward.)

A MAN. Do you intend to marry?

ABE. There is no doubt that public men should have families, but considerable question as to whether their families should tolerate public men.

A MAN. What is your stand on the question of slavery?

(But as ABE is about to reply, the SMALL BOY shoulders his way through the lowest tier and runs toward ABE, but halts about CENTER, a little frightened at his own temerity. He looks back at the huge group of people from whom he has come, and then toward ABE, equally huge in his isolation; he does not know, now, whether to go backward or forward; so, he stares down at his feet, miserable.)

ABE (addressing the CROWD). May I postpone reply while I defer to a small boy?

A MAN. Talk to him, Abe—go ahead.

(Muttered cries of assent from the CROWD.)

ABE (to the BOY). You can come closer.

BOY. This is all right. What's your imaginary name, Mr. Gray?

ABE. Oh—Abe Gray.

(*The BOY looks at him quizzically a moment, then chuckles.*)

BOY (*grinning*). I don't think parents would like that kind of answer.—Do you like being important?

ABE. No. But I like the idea of it so much that I've just got to be—important. What's *your* name?

BOY. I don't know yet. I'm changing it.

(*The CROWD, growing restive, has begun to leave the tiers and is exiting.*)

A MAN (*waving to ABE*). When you're through being with the boy, we'll be back.

ABE (*nodding*). I guess so. Try not to hurry.

(*All the CROWD has now left the stage. Only the bare planks of the tiers remain. The BOY steals a glance at them, and then, suddenly, rushes over to scramble up from one plank to another till he is at the top, where he sits.*)

BOY. I just discovered your North Pole!

ABE. Better raise the Flag. For the United States.

(*The BOY takes out a small American Flag from his pocket, which he unfurls and holds in one hand.*)

BOY. I can't plant it, so I guess I'll just hold it. We'll have the ceremonies later. Do you like children?

ABE. No.

BOY. Why not?

ABE. Well, imagine yourself a grownup. Then think of something inside of you like a cupped hand holding something good to eat. Then think of a very friendly animal licking that hand. Then think of having to make a fist and sending the animal away. Grown-ups have to do that. Children don't. I'm jealous.

BOY. All right, but what about the big fist you can make to wallop somebody?

ABE. Suppose I don't want to wallop anybody?

BOY. Then you're in trouble. And you forgot something. Sometimes you have to hit that friendly animal on the snout. Children aren't afraid to do that. You make a mistake about making a fist and sending the animal away. You wallop it away. Or you can make

a face at it. Not just a fist. You forgot what animals are like. You better remember.

ABE. If I did remember, everything would become too comic—

BOY. It isn't for a child—

ABE. For a man, though, it is. And then I wouldn't want to do anything at all but laugh.

BOY. What's wrong with just laughing?

ABE (*laughing*). Everything—just everything—you get helpless with laughter.

BOY. So.

ABE. You get to feeling that you're doing wrong if you're helpless.

BOY. Why shouldn't we feel right if we're doing wrong just as much if we're doing right? Because lots of times when I do right I feel like I'm doing wrong. By the way, how old are you?

ABE. Thirty-five.

BOY. Do you cry anymore?

ABE. Once in awhile.

BOY. That's not good either. You should get somebody else to do your crying for you. My mother and father do mine. They're pretty good at it.

ABE. How old are you?

BOY. Eleven, going on everything.

ABE. You know, I wish I knew where all the animals are.

BOY. We got them.

ABE. I miss them. It isn't that men are godless so much as animal-less.

BOY. What's that mean?

ABE (*with sudden fury*). Call off the gods! It wouldn't be so bad if we merely kept up with the Joneses, but we must keep up with the Jones' gods and the Jones' devils. Give me an animal for a simple day. Boy—have you a spare animal?

BOY. I think you'd better go.

ABE. Where?

BOY. Where you're supposed to. Any child knows where it's supposed to go.

ABE. Boy—men lose their supposes.

BOY. I don't believe you.

ABE. I won't force you to.

BOY. See? You ought to force me.

ABE. I will not.

BOY. Come on. I dare you.

ABE. Men can't accept dares from children.

BOY. Ah—that's a real shame. I'm sorry for you.

ABE. I don't mind a child being sorry for me. I'd like to take you with me. A handy sorry-for-me.

BOY. It's all right with me.

ABE (*wryly*). I can't. I don't believe in child-labor. I better go. Will you protect your North Pole up there?

BOY. Sure. I'll grow up with it. But we got to have ceremonies. You can't go past it improper. March! Abe Gray! March!

ABE. I must have a tune to keep time. Do you know any?

BOY. Yes. You ready?

(ABE *straightens up, stands stiffly with his arms rigid at his sides.*)

ABE. Ready.—No spare animals, eh?

BOY. Nope.—When I start whistling, you march.

(*The BOY stands up and holds his little American Flag aloft. He is a staunch, strange figure way up there on top of the empty tiers. For a moment, all is still. Then, he starts to whistle and ABE slowly marches. The BOY whistles "John Brown's Body." When ABE is abreast of the BOY, he turns his head in the direction of the flag and smartly salutes. Having passed, he once again turns his head straight before him and EXITS, still marching. The BOY whistles a couple more bars, and then abruptly stops. He seems suddenly frightened. He calls out.*)

BOY. Abe? Abe Gray?

(*There is no answer.*)

BOY. Abe—You got to help me down!

(*No answer.*)

BOY. You're not supposed to leave little boys up here all alone! Abe!

(*No answer.*)

BOY. How'm I going to get back from your North Pole?

(No answer.)

BOY. I guess I'll have to get down myself. I'm hungry.

(And, as the LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM OUT, the Boy painfully starts his descent, the little American Flag clutched in his hand.)

SCENE 6

(Some tables and chairs. ABE GRAY sits at one of them, writing. A moment passes, and then A MAN ENTERS.)

MAN. Mister Abe Gray ?

ABE (looking up). Yes.

MAN. The votes have been tallied.

ABE. Yes.

MAN. You've lost.

ABE (courteously). Thank you for your trouble.

MAN. Do you have anything to say ?

ABE. Unable to interview the people, we interview the loser.

MAN. That's a lie. It's the winner we're more interested in. Goodnight.

(THE MAN EXITS.)

ABE (smiling). Goodnight.

(ABE makes two huge fists, raises them aloft and, with all his power, he brings them crashing down on the table. It splinters with a ludicrously ugly sound. Sobbing like a child, he sinks down into the broken pieces as— BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 7

(Same as before. But the stage is now filled with the sons and daughters of JOHN CLOWN. They are PAUL, LUKE, ADAM, MATTHEW, RUTH, JUDITH, MARY. And CLOWN's wife, SARAH. They are in various attitudes of standing and sitting and walking, getting their belongings together preparatory to movement. JOHN CLOWN himself is in one corner with ABE GRAY.)

ABE. No, no. I'm a private man, altogether—

JOHN. No private man. Impossible. Inside-out the human organism, turning, contact forever. Altogether abnormal, if you will, special, you see. Where you bound for ?

ABE. Bound? You speak freely. I've—

(*But his words are lost as PAUL, coming to his father, shouts.*)

PAUL. Wagons are set.

JOHN (*to PAUL*). Paul, this Abe here seems facile at failure. I must convert. (*to ABE*) See here—

SARAH (*shouting from another table*). John Clown, have you heard your son?

JOHN. How shall I not hear sons? They deafen my crotch! Veil my crotch, woman!

RUTH. Veil it yourself!

JOHN. Daughters. . . . (*to ABE*) You heard my name?

ABE. Yes.

SARAH (*to her daughters*). Ruth, Judith, Mary—hitch your skirts into the wagon. The Clowns are casting their stale bread once again upon the waters.

JUDITH. It's cold, for god's sake—

MARY. Let him go himself!

JOHN. Put down your rumps for a moment—

RUTH. I've freckles to cover my bones — he moves families around like buckshot—

ADAM. Hock your mouth, Ruth, and a wail of coin—

RUTH. Brothers, they're a proof of—

(*ADAM slaps RUTH across the mouth.*)

RUTH (*yelling*). —A proof of begot. What pride. He comes from a something— hail, ho!

JOHN (*to ABE*). So? Do you laugh?

ABE. At what?

JOHN. Why, the name. Clown. Clown. Could there be music with Clown, I ask you?

ABE. I dare not laugh—

MARY. Laugh. Anyone. At my father's trek across future genealogies. Impersonal mathematics. He flings us across the American table.

LUKE. Let him alone—

MARY. Sons for father, daughters for mother. Where does Mother stand?

SARAH. For whose feet? What's a mother? Maybe Abe Gray

over there—can you evoke a mother, sir.

ABE. No, madame—

SARAH. Well, then, scan me, the cannon boomed a seven-gun salute—

JOHN. Hear? She's military. They're all military. I tell you, Gray, I've an army. I shall enlist you—

ABE. I take poorly to orders—

JOHN. Nun's orders, maybe. Monk's orders. Not God's. I go to Kansas. Matthew—what do we do in Kansas? Tell this flesh, this failure, eh?

MATTHEW. We force it into the free state category—

ABE. That's a lesson, a rote. Sir— (*to JOHN*) he seems your youngest—

JOHN. Mimicry's a miracle, Gray! Let him be joyous that he can ape my cue. What are issue for? To double and triple my bid—

JUDITH (*to ABE*). John Clown the madman. He trails my hair into the wind—

(*ADAM seizes her and hurls her to the floor.*)

ADAM (*to JUDITH*). You want beauty? You've got to brain beauty—

JOHN (*roaring*). Keep to your senses. Mumble only. (*to ABE*) Look at me, sir. An epic of failure. What can Negroes love but an epic of failure? I demand an answer. I shall always demand answers! The government does nothing but defend the sovereign status of the southern states. Sovereignty! A skimpy memory—I shall fatten that skimp—

RUTH (*bawling*). And hang the fat!

JOHN. No—

RUTH. Hang, I say, under the summer sun. Hang fat. That shall make oily bubbles under the summer sun—

JOHN (*to ABE*). She flirts an unfussed eye along the barrel of a rifle—

JOHN (*to RUTH*). This is your female belly in the imaginaiton, that makes empty ropes of terror before the action—

RUTH. I say hang! And drat the heart, the chin shall dangle—what a shame you've no double chins, father—you would have more comfort. But be joyous indeed—for as you hang the flies will swarm

blackly on you, and white shall be Negro in a black death—

ABE. She says plans—

JOHN. I'm opulent with plans, a state, a nation. I deal with God.

ABE. No soul deals with—

JOHN (*shouting*). John Clown deals with God. John Clown does not belong to souls. Religionless John Clown, sir. Understand? Which levels me with the Almighty—

ABE (*laughing*). And you breathe?

JOHN. I can cope with your laughter. Stop it.

(ABE *continues laughing*. JOHN *stands and clouts him*. ABE *keeps laughing, rolls with the blow and lifts JOHN up with an easy swing and tosses him onto the floor*. CLOWN'S sons *glower at ABE and advance on him*. ABE *crouches, waiting*.)

JOHN (*to his sons*). Let the tall man be what he is: do not crouch him!

(CLOWN'S sons *turn aside*. JOHN *rises slowly, painfully*. ABE *straightens up*.)

JOHN (*softly, to ABE*). I accept your equality.

ABE. I deny it.

JOHN. You shall not. None of you shall deny—

JUDITH (*interrupting*). Rape—

MARY. Murder—

RUTH. Pillage, looting, fire—

JUDITH. All to justify his hanging—

JOHN. Doesn't the black man hang? They are in their Egypt.

ABE. Your pyramids are upside down!

JOHN. History stands on its head, practicing abstinence. A teetotaller is indifferent to his shape. A man must drag himself and his time into a direction. There are a hundred thousand black men in a baffle of bond, and we—

ABE (*interrupting*). I myself abstain from liquors and tobacco—

JOHN. Trivial riposte. Clout me again—

ABE (*desperately*). I must dredge certain minutiae up at times, cover my face—

JOHN. I don't understand. How do these tiny abstentions stand at the swivel of grimacing conflicts? Do you sex?

ABE. Eh?

JOHN. I say, do you sex?

(ABE stands silent.)

JUDITH (giggling). Shall he be shown, father?

MARY (with a soft irony and compassion). Let the tall man be what he is: do not crouch him.

(ABE is dumb. He looks with shame and pain at the assemblage. He starts to go, but ADAM seizes him and pivots him to LUKE, who in turn pushes him over to MATTHEW. ABE makes no move of resistance. He is ludicrous and pathetic, this tall gaunt man. MATTHEW hurls him against wall. The brothers laugh, as do JUDITH and RUTH; only MARY and SARAH do not. JOHN CLOWN looks at him oddly.)

JOHN. You've brought up your vulnerables. Why?

ABE (almost inaudibly). If I gain an advantage, perhaps I must have others see that I have none.

JOHN. That makes you damned, worse than I. I think I love you. Sarah, love him. Daughters and sons—love him! Country—love him! Nation—love him! There are nations and empires enough for you and me, Abe Gray! Mankind—love Abe Gray—I command mankind to love Abe Gray. Sir, I have friends.

ABE (shaking his head). I reject them.

JOHN. Oh, I need friends, and therefore have them. I lust them, having lost all else—

RUTH. The bold bankrupt—

JUDITH. The father-frill, not the father-fist—

RUTH. He banged bibles down on desks—

JOHN. The Bibles bear the accounts. The Scriptures reveal no double-entry divinity—

JUDITH (laughing hysterically). You should've seen our throats hop with hunger. We caught hacking coughs at the draft of dollars blasting by our faces, the wind that father blew himself, blew—blew—the master of the mission, the murderer of the common-place, the—

(JOHN swiftly strides over to her and claps a hand over her mouth. She struggles in vain.)

JOHN (laughing). Down, daughter, down. (to ABE) She spits at times in the drizzle of dogs.—Will you come with us? West,

and east. (*to his sons and daughters*) Move the remainders out.

(*There is now constant movement of the sons and daughters and SARAH OFF and ONSTAGE, back and forth, as they carry their belongings out and return for more.*)

JOHN (*to ABE*). Well?

ABE. No. And you yourself must stay.

JOHN. Stay? Well, I have made a constitution, of which I am the preamble and the signature. I could not give up my composition: I am well-read, and clear about my presidency and as to the body of the houses of the congress, through which John Clown must flow. It is a state much like the construction of some statuary I have seen, with a black base and a white head. I could not let that piece of paper kite out that door without this John Clown to keep it aloft. I am a document, and a doctrine, and a way of many men. We cannot stay, we cannot wait. If you must say what I am, name me the impulse of the impulse, or the butcher of the cleft. I will lead some whites, who are my friends, to war against many white men, who are my enemies. But the mass of men who will follow me will be black. It is they, in the main, who cannot wait, and I am their impatience. We mean to secede both from the North and the South; and, as in empires a democracy crouches in the cellars, so in this democracy John Clown dreams from the attics. If there is slavery to many men, it will be more economical for the Negroes to enslave themselves to one man alone. In that they cannot be free at once, they must make me their transitional. This must be so, if I am willing to die for it. Do you choose to remember more or less of me?

ABE. I'm doubtful of men willing to die, either for a cause or a passion or a whim or a whine, as if the body were made up of last straws. I charge such men as you with snobbery!

JOHN. My fingers have pulled at dirt to push me up—call me no snob!

ABE. Foul, stinking, carrion-christened snob, loathsome with sacrifice, that would cuckold his life-cells by whoring with death. Was the sweetness that underlay you so aghast at the hunger of hummingbirds that it did retch itself up? Were you terrified at the convention of all the small things about you, John Clown? Shook,

did you? at a mote of sunlight? Did a cloud smite you with distance? Did one atom hold within itself the hugest bell that clanged a carillon of universes in your ear? A pimple upon your neck shriek of the tons of vanity heaped upon it? A scratch at the door convey gangling ghosts, spirits too awkward for your substance? A drop of water Noah's punishing flood? Were there too many tiny things in the world for you, John Clown?

JOHN (*shouting to his sons*). Haul down his mouth!

(CLOWN's sons circle about ABE as he takes CLOWN by the shoulders and shakes him as easily as he would a puppy.)

ABE. A small man will not bring this country down—a small man will not—

JOHN. Haul down his mouth—

(CLOWN's sons jump ABE, drag him from their father and begin to beat at him with their fists. ABE fights back, but their numbers are too much for him and he finally goes down.)

ABE. A small man—

(They kick him and he loses consciousness. The sons draw back. JOHN stares down at the unconscious ABE.)

JOHN (*to his family*). Into the wagons!

(They all go except MARY, who joins her father to look down at ABE.)

JOHN (*softly*). He said some sense, but what's the sense of it? One must fumble with fury to credit the sense of sense at all.

MARY (*flatly*). He should wear his trousers more tightly.

(She takes her father's arm.)

MARY. Come, father; I should like grass over my grief for you as quickly as possible.

(Together, they EXIT. LIGHTS DIM OUT.)

SCENE 8

(Stationed diagonally across the stage is a line of Negroes harvesting a crop. Very faintly, in the distance, is the sound of a train whistle, remotely melancholy. One of the Negroes is a giant, by the name of HENRY, his voice more resonant and powerful than the others. They are all singing a spiritual, "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child." ABE ENTERS DOWNSTAGE RIGHT.

One end of the line of Negroes is UPSTAGE RIGHT. ABE is wearing a frock coat and plug hat.—Throughout the scene, the Negroes keep singing till otherwise indicated. Only HENRY speaks with ABE.)

ABE (*to HENRY*). Your name?

HENRY. Henry. Do you hear the whistle?

(*ABE listens. There is the mournful sound of the train whistle, now a little closer. ABE nods.*)

HENRY. You are on the train.

(*ABE looks OS.*)

HENRY. But without your hat. You might remove it for courtesy.

(*ABE takes off his hat.*)

ABE. Is the body courteous to remove its flesh?

HENRY (*astonished*). Yes, because everyone passing is naked, and mutters, "Toss me a bone."

ABE. It is a story, of course, that I am on that train.

HENRY (*grunting*). Ho!

ABE. I hear many stories.—Why do you harvest at night?

HENRY. For a story.

ABE. John Clown just now told me the story that you want your freedom.

HENRY. Rifles and cannon ago John Clown was hanged for assaulting the federal fortress at Atlantic Ferry.

ABE. What had he to say of me before he died?

HENRY. I think he mentioned a rainbow-colored Christ, at the end of which was a pot of soul, to which we all tended; I think he called himself a prophet honored only at Halloween; I think he said, with a gnash of humor, that the country would survive him; I think he said his memory would be but revived for hatred or ignorance; I think he insisted on interment in a Negro cemetery; had silence for his wife, boldness for his daughters, indifference for his sons; said there was a bazaar he must attend, and then loosened his stiff collar, remarking that the noose would thereby find his neck more comfortable. As he died, he twisted his neck, to see what was coming. Nothing of Abe Gray.

ABE. Could he not have dreamed of me?

HENRY. Dreaming of you now is a commonplace.
(*The mournful sound of the train whistle is closer.*)

ABE. It comes slowly.

HENRY. Because we do not want it to pass. It will stop at the crossroads so that we can see your body for the last time. Then it will move on to others.

ABE. This must be a story.

HENRY. Then it does not concern you.

ABE. When we are stories, we are most concerned. There is the story that you want your freedom. Is it so?

HENRY. We mourn you that you did not live to remedy your error!

ABE (*roaring*). Men are free slaves!

HENRY. No. Men make distinctions.

ABE. They must not.

HENRY. You cannot prevent them.

ABE. I will.

HENRY. How?

ABE. By indecision. We must have a race of indecisive men. Only thus will war be expunged, and mankind preserved.

(*The train whistle now sounds loudly three times. The Negroes stop their singing, straighten up and slowly EXIT. HENRY is the last to start off.*)

ABE (*calling after him*). I do not want to be dead.

HENRY (*calling back*). You shall have to make a choice, Abe Gray.

(HENRY EXITS, leaving ABE standing alone looking OS. The lights begin to dim.)

ABE (*quietly*). It is only a story. How heartless that man in the coffin must be.

(*He puts his plug hat back on, as DIMOUT.*)

SCENE 9

(*Many soldiers, in gray uniforms and blue, milling about. Some of those in gray stand in groups by themselves, as do some of those in blue; while many blue and gray are mixed, and laughing. All of them are privates or non-commissioned officers. Little*

by little, officers of both colors come on the scene; as they do so, the noncoms and privates slowly EXIT; finally, only the officers remain and, according to the color of their uniforms, group themselves on opposite sides of the stage, murmuring inaudibly. In a little while, the murmuring dies down; there is total silence, and both elements look OS expectantly. In a moment, GENERAL ROBERTSON, in gray uniform, ENTERS, an ornamental sword hanging from his waist. He comes on with a proud stride, and halts, seeming somewhat surprised that someone he obviously expects is not present. He turns to one of his AIDES, who speaks to him in low, inaudible tones. As they speak, GENERAL BRANT, in blue, ENTERS from the opposite side of the stage, obviously fatigued and wearing no sword. As a matter of fact, the contrast between the two generals is striking; ROBERTSON is in meticulous full dress, while BRANT is unkempt. ROBERTSON, his back turned, is unaware that BRANT has come. BRANT says nothing, nor do his aides; he waits patiently, loath to interrupt ROBERTSON. Only when ROBERTSON's aide glances off in BRANT's direction does ROBERTSON slowly wheel and face BRANT. ROBERTSON nods very slightly, the most token of tokens, while BRANT very nearly bows.)

BRANT. General Robertson, I am honored.

ROBERTSON. No more than I, General Brant.

BRANT. You must excuse my field dress.

ROBERTSON. Of course.

BRANT. It was a long ride.

ROBERTSON. Inevitably, the conquered has a short one.

BRANT. It may be. I don't believe I've seen the General since we last served in the Mexican Campaign together.

ROBERTSON. It is kind of you to remember.

BRANT. Kind? No, sir. I am compelled. I do not find it expedient to my nature to keep my admiration in reserve; I like my admiration, so to speak, in my front line, and ever in the field. You were my senior in the Mexican difference; I dare say that were it not for this circumstantial opposite, I should still be accepting your command.

ROBERTSON. But the circumstance itself is arrogant.

BRANT. Its men need not be. Perhaps today, being past the

circumstance, I feel superior to it, but never to its combatants.

ROBERTSON (*with a hint at humor*). Are you noble, General?

BRANT (*smiling*). I find I must sound that bugle from time to time, but I mute it by and by.—There was a flanking maneuver in the Mexican Campaign which you executed—

ROBERTSON (*gently interrupting*). Is there a mimicry here?

BRANT. Only by your leave.

(ROBERTSON *considers this a moment, and then smiles.*)

ROBERTSON. You have it. However, while I should enjoy the Mexican memory, I think it best you conduct me to my surrender, and its terms.

BRANT (*simply*). I had to conduct myself. It was a long ride. I am glad it's done.

ROBERTSON. There are terms. Here is my sword.

(ROBERTSON *unbuckles his sword, and presents it to BRANT, who holds it for a moment and then gives it to an aide who carries it OFFSTAGE. The officers in gray bow their heads.*)

BRANT. I should have preferred you kept it.

ROBERTSON. But you did not entertain rejecting it.

BRANT. That would have been a cheap entertainment, sir, to have made you keep a weapon never intended for use.

(ROBERTSON *bows his head, and straightens.*)

ROBERTSON. What are the victor's terms?

(BRANT *takes a few steps away, as if to mull the matter.*)

BRANT. I have them, of course, done briefly by President Gray. But I am discontented.

ROBERTSON. With the terms?

BRANT. With how I should present them.

ROBERTSON. Are they so harsh?

BRANT. They are so conciliatory they all but efface themselves. Your enlisted men will give up their arms, your officers retain theirs. All your men shall go home and shall not be disturbed by federal authority so long as they keep their promise not to do battle against the government again. Let each man of your army claim horse or mule; we know you have many small farmers who need them to work their land; we cannot have a living peace with men starving in it.

(ROBERTSON *in amazement turns momentarily to his aides, who are equally astonished. Then he turns back to BRANT.*)

ROBERTSON (*in low tones*). You set the terms forth?

BRANT. No, no. The President.

ROBERTSON. Would you have had them more severe?

BRANT. I was astonished that Mister Gray could have discerned in my mind's wide spaces of tolerance the same modestly limiting markers.

ROBERTSON. Sir, we have seen so much flowing blood that we cannot seem to challenge it with tears; we are your quiet debtors.

BRANT. You need exhibit nothing. Exhibition was my task, and I have failed it.

ROBERTSON. I do not see how you could have anymore understated an understatement.

BRANT. No, sir.

(BRANT *slowly begins to pace back and forth between blue and gray.*)

BRANT (*as he paces*). There needs to be more than terms, in that there should have been none at all as the President and I spoke of it, and as I thought of it often during the campaign. I deem myself a soldier, but dreamed that you would never capitulate. I tell you it is offensive of me to put out my thoughts, but we can rarely find that tentative territory between the insult of expressiveness and the misapprehension of taciturnity to convey position's apology. We are in positions, sir, and I would have avoided such blatancy were it not inconceivable they be struck out in the blinding blizzards of force that make us lose our way so that we hold to them. I have lost my way, sir, to find the head of one army submitting to the head of another. I did not want to thrust my face at yours; however bland its features, you must look into them and see the vanity of myself here. Let me tell you I have grown beards to obscure such vanity, but my presence bristles nonetheless. I have been ruthless in my battles because I cannot understand capitulation, only to be grossly coupled with it now, no greater gorge than such in the absence of surrender's sensuality. I would there were no flesh here, and swore there'd be none after so much flesh fell on the battlefields I could have cried the earth itself was all too human, else it

could not have made way for so many men. The President saw my meaning, and wished with me that Robertson and Brant might take their leave of one another from afar.

(ROBERTSON *stares at BRANT for a long moment, as the latter continues, very slowly, to pace. Then, very gently, he halts him.*)

ROBERTSON (*very softly*). Please go no further; you are as tired as I. The South may see your meaning.

BRANT. I fervently hope it may, sir.

ROBERTSON. Then good-day, General Brant.

BRANT. Good-day to you, sir.

(ROBERTSON *and his retinue EXIT, BRANT and his retinue EXIT—from opposite sides of the stage. The lights DIM OUT.*)

SCENE 10

(*Many men and women drinking. They sit at tables, they stand at a long plank over which drinks are served. They walk back and forth, ENTER and EXIT. They yell, they laugh, they sing in various stages of drunkenness, they even dance unsteadily among the tables from time to time. Altogether, it is an atmosphere of jubilation and celebration. On a small dais, a guitarist strums away; sometimes he can be heard, sometimes not.—Many men are still in uniform, both blue and gray.*)

GITARIST (*singing*).

Hurrah for the North,

Hurrah for the South,

I'm for the people

Both sides of my mouth!

A MAN (*yelling at Guitarist*). Keep a Civil War in your head!
(*Raucous laughter.*)

GITARIST (*singing*).

I know a sauga

About a girl from Chicamauga—

Hey, Stubby—hey ho ho!

They warned poor Stubby

About Chicamauga Creek,

Cause that was where

She came to take a—

(The final word is drowned out by near-hysterical feminine laughter.)

A MAN. Three cheers for President Gray!

(The cheers are given.)

A WOMAN. Three cheers for General Robertson!

(The cheers are given.)

A WOMAN. Let's fight another war! I love sacrificing myself: you can be as dirty as you want but still feel clean!

A MAN. Let's look for another war!

(Laughing lustily, he grabs a man and both fall on their knees and crawl around from table to table wherever there is a woman sitting, and look underneath. They now both laugh uncontrollably.)

BOTH MEN *(from under a table)*. Give us a bloody sacrifice!

GUITARIST *(singing)*.

Ever look up from a battlefield

See grapeshot flying west and east,

See grapeshot flying like wild geese

That never fly north, never fly south,

But only west and only east—

A MAN *(bawling at the BARTENDER)*. Gimme a double reveille back in my mouth!

BARTENDER *(bawling back)*. Stack your cannonballs somewhere else!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD. —A shot of Irish!

—You hear the President hiccup at Gettysburg?

—Git outa there, soldier, you're foolin with the woman I hate!

—I mooed like a cow at Bull Run!

—I'd take one of his stumps, mister, before I'd let you fan me with five fingers!

—Secede, mister, secede!

—Soldier you dance like you had your ass in a splint!

—Lady I'd hate to tell you where I feel you have yours!

—It looks something like a crab, soldier, and she can do it sideways too!

—Bartender, I'm comin through your rye!

—Bring on the niggers fuh chrissake!

—Maybe the niggers gonna emancipate the white man!

—Whang that guitar, mister!

(*The GUITARIST jangles "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" at incredible speed, and the CROWD joins in the chorus.*)

THE CROWD. Glory Glory Hallelujah—

A MAN (*interrupting*). Four whores and seven years ago—
(*Wild laughter.*)

GUITARIST (*with a raucous reel*).

Hitched up my ass to seven mules,
Half went this way and half the other
And left an old fart
Sittin on the stools!

THE CROWD (*singing*). Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord—

A MAN. Where there's a wheel there's a way!

A WOMAN. What do we do when we go outside? There isn't anymore war on!

A MAN. Garden Theatre let out yet?

(*An actor ENTERS. His name is GORDON BONE, and he hears the last line.*)

BONE (*to the MAN*). Fifteen minutes past.

(*BONE still wears some of his makeup, and this gives his face a rather unearthly appearance. He goes to the bar and orders a drink, and then turns round to watch the crowd. A look of contempt crosses his face. With disgust, he cannot help but stare at a buxom wench asprawl in a chair, very nearly reclining, over whom a white man, sitting in an adjacent chair, bends with a kind of lustful compassion and runs a free hand down her bare shoulder.*)

SCENE II

(*ANN HATCHER stretched out on a small bed. ABE GRAY sits by her side, bending slightly over her, and has a hand on her shoulder. Her eyes are closed. She opens them.*)

ANN. Abe.

ABE. Yes.

ANN. What time is it?

(*ABE takes out a large watch and consults it.*)

ABE. Fifteen minutes past three.

ANN. Morning.

ABE. Yes.

ANN. I can feel my mind just back of my eyes. What does that mean?

(He shrugs.)

ABE. Fever. Nothing more.

ANN. How long have you been with me?

ABE. Two days.

(She tries to sit up, alarmed for him, but he gently restrains her.)

ANN. But it's December, and you should be in Washington.

ABE. It's only my first term there. In his first term a man in the Congress is simply a clerk for his district.

ANN. You must tell my mother and father that I don't need you, and go back. I don't know why they called you.

ABE. I instructed them to, if anything befell you.

ANN. Do you think I will die?

SCENE 12

(Same as Scene 10, continued.)

GUITARIST *(high above the melange of sound)*.

A man came in
With a lonely limb
He had lost in Sherman's ride.
He'll swing it around
Till he has found
A clock that'll be his bride!

A MAN. Let's celebrate forever!

A WOMAN. My son died at Fredericksburg, Sumter, Shiloh, Richmond—he's got no place to die anymore!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD. —Nobody'll die anymore!

—We just got to keep celebrating!

—I can't hear anybody that isn't laughing!

—Another round of Irish!

BARTENDER *(to BONE)*. I hear the President's going to see the play you're in tomorrow night.

BONE. That so?

SCENE 13

(*Same as Scene 11, continued.*)

ANN. I don't know what you're here for. I've a right to know why you're here.

ABE. I am concerned.

ANN. Why?

ABE. I want to be concerned.

ANN. Why?

ABE. A man values himself more if he is concerned for others.

ANN. That's a universal lie!

ABE. Doctor Knight ordered me to keep you composed.

ANN (*sardonically paraphrasing*). We who are about to die—are not composed.

ABE. Nobody has said you're to die.

ANN. It takes no flourish of your pulse or mine to tell me.—I forbid you to be concerned for me.

ABE. All right, then, I am concerned for my grief.

ANN. Better, better. Do you love me?

ABE. I don't know.

ANN. Better and better. I am a young body in the prime of your eyes. Do you regret my passing?

ABE. I regret I am here to see you pass.

ANN. Still better! You would rather go, would you not?

ABE. Yes.

ANN. Very good. Why, then, do you not go?

ABE. The crime would be to let you here alone.

ANN. I am already alone. Touch my hand.

(*He touches her hand.*)

ANN. I do not feel it.—Run your finger down my cheek.

(*He does so.*)

ANN. Nothing. The least you could do now would be to excite me, excite me! Why can't you excite me, Abe Gray?

ABE. You're alone.

ANN. Excellent, excellent! Then—get out!

ABE. No.

ANN. Get out, I say! You could have had me! Get out!

ABE. There was a campaign—

ANN (*interrupting*). Feeble, sir!

ABE. I had committed myself to a political party—

ANN (*interrupting*). Concupiscent commitment, eh? Lust on the stump, eh? Sweaty hands around the voters' hearts, did you say? Tell me, sir, what is the sensation of fornicating with the public weal? Or was your sex formed for the mass before it measured for the individual? How is that, sir? When you were born from your mother, was there collective fatherhood? Do you expiate your guilt at such by plunging skullfirst at the people?

ABE. Only my mother and myself were present at my birth—

ANN. Niggards! You are all private, Abe. Private.

(*She sobs in great gasps.*)

ANN. Ah, private, yes, I am alone—alone—alone before all men leaching after their privacies. Let me die for woman's sake!

ABE. There is no sex in dying!

ANN. You are learning, sir! And you cannot love me.

ABE. No, I cannot, because you die.

ANN. Would you save me?

ABE. I will not answer.

ANN. I am your constituent: therefore, answer. I voted for you: therefore, answer.

ABE. I would not save you.

ANN. Why?

ABE. That would give me a kind of heroism.

ANN. Will you not be heroic?

ABE. No. It is too youthful.

ANN. You would damn youth?

ABE. Yes.

ANN. Why?

ABE. Youth damns my meditation.

ANN. Why shouldn't it? You are a thinker on war and peace. We want no thinking on it! Thought is a Last Supper, reflection is a betrayal of action, a creator of distinctions, demarcations—and there are no lines, no boundaries, no outlines or inlines or between-lines—you could have had me, Abe Gray!

ABE. As man and a woman—a distinction—

(She breaks out into wild laughter.)

ANN. You make the distinction because you did not have me! In the thrashing thrall of having there would have been no dissensions and no tranquilities, no man and no woman, no sense of life and no sense of death. You are a tragedy of sense, Abe Gray!

(She raises herself in the bed, spreading her arms.)

ANN *(shrieking)*. Go—go—

SCENE 14

(Same as Scene 12, continued).

BARTENDER *(to BONE)*. Is it a good play the President will see you in?

BONE. Mister Gray and the audience will judge that. Do you understand, then, that the actor is unmoral when he is on the stage?—Is it certain he will attend?

BARTENDER. Rumor has it.

BONE. Little it doesn't. Rumor is a stud.—He will be in his box, of course.

BARTENDER. With his wife, and the Secretary of State. And perhaps his personal physician.

BONE. His doctor? With such an array of disciples, a man might lose faith in himself. We must prevent it.

BARTENDER. Prevent what? Bone, you sometimes speak like a child, in serious ciphers and mysteries put away for the winter, and in revenging riddles as if the clarity of an event or a man affronts you.

BONE. I am affronted, but not by clarity. We are still south, sir!

BARTENDER. With as much brandy as you have taken, and owning so many roles, you cannot know realty from reality nor care too much where the compass-needle settles on direction as much as you insist it swell within itself and burst asunder all restraint of man knowing where he is.

BONE. I know where I am.

BARTENDER. Do you?

BONE. I wonder if you will dare specify where you are not? Are you north tonight?

BARTENDER. The war is done.

BONE. I do not feel it.

BARTENDER. There is the fact.

BONE. It is a fact I do not feel.

BARTENDER. That is a personal fact against a public fact.

BONE. We shall see how the personal infects the public.

BARTENDER. He has a physician.

BONE. Who cannot mend the whole public.

BARTENDER. This is true. But they will recover of themselves.

BONE. I mean the South to recover.

BARTENDER. Will it recover better without him?

BONE. Yes. Of itself!

BARTENDER. It will be surly and morosely proud—of itself.

BONE. Let it determine that for itself.

BARTENDER. Let it! Are you some supernatural agent to determine its determination? You are simply an actor who has lost one of his roles.

BONE. Do you plead for the man?

BARTENDER. Should I?

(BONE *peers at the BARTENDER as if to examine how far he can go as the GUITARIST begins a new song.*)

GUITARIST (*singing*).

I wish I were a soldier
They left behind,
Whose body lost its way
And wandered through his mind,
And saw the whole landscape
Very very gray, very gray,
So maybe he'd be President some day,
So maybe he'd be President one day—

VOICES FROM THE CROWD. —We ain't that drunk we can laugh at that!

—Spank some sparks outa that guitar!

—Pull it up, mister, pull it up!

SCENE 15

(*Same as Scene 13, continued. ANN has fallen asleep, and she wakes with a start.*)

ANN (*staring about her*). I thought you'd gone. I thought everyone had gone. I thought I—had gone. (*with a rending shriek, laughing*) I thought all the people of the last conjugation had gone!

(*She sinks back on the bed.*)

ANN. My blood is falling down a stairway!

(*Abe takes her hand.*)

ANN. Do you know what I weigh?

(*Abe shakes his head no; he can for the moment say nothing.*)

ANN. I weigh ninety-five pounds of memory!

(*She sits up, crouches toward him.*)

ANN. Will I gain or lose weight? Tell me! Who will inherit me? Give me some last words for god's sake! Supply me with an historical hiccup. How shall I be immortal? I am as young as if I never knew who I am!

(*She snaps her fingers.*)

ANN. A name! Give me a name! Abe, some water to baptise my parch—sprinkle some music over my dust that the ear of a flower may rise. What did I want? I have now such a pressure of never knowing what I wanted that vacuums make reverse salvos against each side of my skull—(*she presses her hands against the sides of her head*) that the suction sacks my brain.

(*She turns suddenly to ABE.*)

ANN. I love you. I give you permission to tell me that you love me. Permission granted—granted—granted! Do you understand? Not that you love Ann Hatcher—but me!

ABE. Yes, I love you.

ANN. How?

ABE. Hiddenly.

ANN (*very softly*). Oh.

ABE (*very softly*). Do you know why love is hidden?

(*She shakes her head slowly, winsomely.*)

ABE. Because it keeps a secret.

ANN. What secret?

ABE. Youth.

ANN. You feel youngly toward me.

ABE. Yes.

ANN. Now I wish I could stay!

ABE. You shall.

ANN (*almost inaudibly*). I can't. Is it spring or autumn?

ABE. Summer. I can't hear you too well.

(*He suddenly stands and calls OS.*)

ABE. Doctor Knight! Tom—quickly!

ANN (*shaking her head*). He shan't be able to raise my voice.

ABE (*desperately*). I'll make you angry—Ann!

ANN (*shaking her head*). Abe, come close. Make the last rites of intimacy.

ABE (*calling OS*). Tom Knight!

ANN (*beckoning*). Abe—

(*He bends down over her.*)

ABE (*his voice choking*). I wish I could collect your pallor, to see it better—there must be a sprig of fire—Ann—all the days I could have read the law in you—there is no equity in your death—I demand an equity—

ANN (*with an effort at humor*). You mustn't take all the final phrases from me—

ABE. I will not know you unless you live. I will not live unless I know you.

ANN. Something young must die in a man before his appetites can shift to outward things, and devour all his disciplines. I am that youngness; soon, you'll go beyond yourself.

(TOM KNIGHT ENTERS, and ABE turns to him.)

ABE.. Save her.

SCENE 16

(*Same as Scene 14, continued.*)

BONE (*to the BARTENDER*). Would you save him? We are defeated.

BARTENDER. Save him from what?

BONE. But the spell, man—the spell!

(*The GUITARIST begins to play "Yankee Doodle" and a number of couples start to dance.*)

BONE (*to the BARTENDER*). Order the man to play another song.

BARTENDER. We order nobody.

BONE. We must rescue order. Forgive my ferocious sentimen-

talities—

BARTENDER (*cutting in*). Exactly.

BONE. But at the least a southern tune.

BARTENDER. No "at least." Desperation devils a man.

BONE. The spell, man!

BARTENDER (*above the din*). What spell?

BONE (*above the din*). The moss hanging over the landscape like a lock of hair—and the masters! The masters who brush it aside. How can you so easily forget you were a master? Is superiority too much for the superior? The weight of command, the spume of mounted authority. We took white in our teeth like a bit to rear over the black muscles of the waves—I will not forget. The superior knows but one servitude: the memory of his mastery. How can I forget? I issued a breath—and the nigger was a mirror on which it formed to becloud any shape he may have reflected before—

GITARIST (*in an orgy of repetition*).

Yankee Doodle Dandy

Yankee Doodle Dandy

Yankee Doodle Dandy

Yankee Doodle Dandy

Yankee Doodle Dandy

BONE (*screaming*). Shut him up!

GITARIST. Yankee Doodle Dandy—

BONE (*screaming*). Nigger-frigging North—

(*There is a sudden silence.*)

BONE (*screaming against the total silence*). NIGGER-FRIGGING NORTH!

(*The CROWD stares at him. The BARTENDER leaps over the plank and stands in front of Bone.*)

BARTENDER. He's an actor— he plays many roles— no actor knows what he wants—

(*The CROWD bursts into laughter and the dancers surround BONE and dance around him in a drunken chant.*)

THE DANCERS (*chanting*).

No actor knows what he wants—

No actor knows what he wants—

(*As they dance around BONE, each one successively snatches at*

an article of his clothing and tears it off—his collar, his tie, his coat—and as each article is torn off BONE tries, yelling, to retrieve it, but the Dancer who has it tosses it beyond the circle, BONE attempting to follow but the Dancers throwing him back into the center till BONE is down to his underpants, the CROWD howling maniacally.)

THE CROWD (*taking up the Dancers' chant*). No actor knows what he wants—

(*They continue to laugh as BONE suddenly becomes aware of his nakedness, and he huddles, sobbing, on the floor. The BARTENDER is finally able to come to his aid and leads him, as though he were a child, OFFSTAGE.*)

GUJARIST (*whanging the guitar*).

Once I knew an actor naked as sin,
Said he played Adam afore Eve came in,
He didn't know nothin, he didn't know nothin,
Said he played Adam afore Eve came in!
We don't know nothin, we don't know nothin,
We all play Adam afore Eve comes in!

SCENE 17

(*Same as Scene 15, continued.*—ABE stands to one side. TOM KNIGHT straightens up from the still form of ANN. ABE stares at him coldly.)

TOM. Nothing can be done.

ABE (*coldly*). You said you were my friend, once.

TOM. Yes.

ABE. A "nothing can be done" friend. Ah, you did not hear me.

TOM. What is it, Abe?

ABE. I said, *save* her. Did you?

TOM. The girl is dead.

ABE. That solves you, does it? Bend down, now, and take her back.

(*TOM does not answer, nor move.*)

ABE. Do your joints creak before Hell?

TOM. I think you do not know your place.

ABE (*sweetly*). Come, put forth your arms, and pull her back.

TOM. You have been without food. Let me—

ABE (*interrupting with a smile*). I will take your fingers, and chew them once you have burnt them to my taste wrenching Ann back from Hell.

TOM (*in a whisper*). Why is she there, Abe?

ABE (*in deafening tones*). Lovers are not suited to Heaven, for they rebel too much!

TOM. Heaven will not hear you.

ABE (*quietly, coldly*). They are deaf there, but Hell has a most sensitive ear. (*almost jocularly*) What do you say, now, Tom? Will you not lift her back?

TOM (*turning away*). I cannot.

ABE. "Cannot" is will not. What do you think is the matter with her?

TOM. You have seen her die before your eyes, man!

ABE (*crying out*). We were not lovers, and she belongs neither to Heaven nor to Hell—for virgins are the Earth's.

TOM. She will be there.

ABE. I searched and could not find the graves of my mother and father. If they had none, neither shall Ann have one!

(ABE crosses to ANN and falls over her body, alternately lifting her up and laying her down.)

ABE. ANN—ANN—

TOM (*cold*). Do you make a Punch-and-Judy death, Abe?

(ABE halts suddenly, and rises. He stares stonily at TOM for a moment, and then stiffly EXITS.)

SCENE 18

(In a corner of the stage, BARTENDER and BONE. BONE is straightening his cravat.)

BARTENDER. Courage, such as it is, returns with clothes.

BONE. My dear sir, courage is a man's style.

BARTENDER. And he is in and out of it.

BONE. Courage, too, is subject both to pollution and variety.

BARTENDER. There are better men for whom pollution and variety are subject to courage.

BONE (*lightly*). I wonder if I will kill him.

BARTENDER. Who?

BONE (*lightly*). Why, Abe Gray.

BARTENDER. For what reason?

BONE. I think the simplest. Must he not die sometime?

BARTENDER. Death, the perverse midwife: call him Gordon Bone. But that misleading altruism I cannot suspect you of.

BONE. Tell me, Bartender: would you not aid me if I chose to kill him?

BARTENDER. Do you ask me to aid you?

BONE. I stated a condition.

BARTENDER. I do not buy or sell death-futures, Bone. Why should you want to kill the President?

BONE. I think I hate him.

BARTENDER. Many hate, few murder. I think you will be but an actor, and like your acting too much to vulgarize it by an act.

BONE. You seem to tempt me.

BARTENDER. The whole South tempts you. And the temptor is really blind, to avoid responsibility. Eve looked at the apple as a crystal ball, and never really saw Adam.

BONE. The assassin, then, is the First Man.

BARTENDER. At least he believes he will become a man—by murder. Do you doubt your virility?

BONE. Has the South been castrated?

BARTENDER. I doubt if Abe Gray looks on the South as having been castrated. Ravished, perhaps.

BONE. In either case, its manliness is in question.

BARTENDER. I doubt if Abe Gray had sex in mind when he declared war.

BONE. His hesitation before the declaration declared his sex.

BARTENDER. That is a new theory of history.

BONE. But an old practice of the sexual intellectual.

(*The BARTENDER makes a small bow.*)

BARTENDER. It may be a witty murder. Will you do it?

BONE. I should have to be less witty, I think, and more naked to do so.

SCENE 19

(AGATHA, ABE GRAY's wife, ENTERS with ABE, her arm rest-

ing on his. There is a hubub and a babble of voices OS. They cross the stage, and then ABE suddenly halts.)

AGATHA. What is it?

ABE. Do you think the children will be all right?

AGATHA (*sharply*). As much as they can be with their father a President-elect, and their mother addicted to headaches.

(*ABE glances into a mirror.*)

ABE (*lightly*). I seem to have my forehead on my nose, and a low tide of gray upon my hair.

(*A SERVANT ENTERS.*)

SERVANT. They are impatient, Mister Gray, for your presence.

ABE (*to AGATHA*). They want their focus amongst them.

AGATHA. They do not elect a sun that it stay in heaven.

ABE (*turning to the SERVANT*). Shortly.

(*The SERVANT EXITS.*)

AGATHA. What do you object to, Abe? You cannot break on and off with the people, as you did with me. You cannot write love-letters to the people and then retract them, as you did with me. You cannot reconsider proposal to them, as you did with me. You cannot find them fair, then foul, and then fair again, as with me. Surely you must keep the people in your heart as you would a person, else you cannot catch their caprices and their petitions at the aching source; but if, once bound, you cut the people off, they will not come to you again, as I did, because they may satisfy their loneliness among themselves, as one woman cannot in herself. What do you fear?

ABE. I am a President of a compromise. Both North and South believe I can maintain the Union without war.

AGATHA (*gesturing OFFSTAGE*). They are not North or South out there. They are not the Congress. They are not the separate states. They are those men and women who have chosen you for Washington, and are curious as to how you may shake their hands in the very flush of flesh before pomp and pompousness may puff your grip. Now, take my arm again, and let us go.

ABE. I am concerned that you feel ill.

AGATHA. I shall feel more so if you persist in your concern.

ABE. The slavery issue is too large for me to bear. They will

ask me about it as they have before, again and again, and my reply, as it has been again and again, will be that I am committed to the preservation of the Union.

AGATHA. That commitment may lead you to declare war.

ABE. I believe I will delay my appearance.

AGATHA. You may delay yourself as long as you wish without avoiding appearance, of which your wife is part. Am I perhaps ludicrous in the foam of show? Do my dress and manner trail giggles in their wake?

ABE. I have not said so.

AGATHA. Do you judge so?

ABE. I have not asked you to retract pleasure at display. Jewels and sumptuous clothes are no provisions necessarily for license, nor kindly distract light from a surface mind.

AGATHA. Is it then that you are severe with your own attire in order to draw discomfort next to mine?

ABE. This is certainly not the matter.

AGATHA. I stand here, Abe, impatient for your disclosure, for I have stood patiently in less eminent circumstances by your side, and received the scant due those poor events warranted. As I did not fail your failures, did not diminish in your diminishing law-practice; as I was not the hollow round which you rode circuit-court from county to county year after year, an iron quoit you thought tossed by fate which you could neither narrow nor expand;—in like manner I refuse to be incapable of your triumph. For your services to your party they offered you the governor-generalship of the Northwest Territories, so that they no longer would be indebted to you, and could have interred you with respectful music, with whose final flourish you would have been lowered into obscurity. For your services to yourself, and yours to mine that sovereignty be not a wholly male prerogative—I am no less than the Negro about whom you have some whittling conscience—I counselled you to stay with the States, and let the Northwest Territories abide with a smaller creditor. You will do me some honor now to bring your counsellor before the States, whose people found you amongst them; but you will call me wife, and First Lady, and I am content.

(Gravely, ABE offers her his arm, and together they EXIT.)

SCENE 20

(A CROWD of men and women of all types and economic backgrounds. They are all pressing to reach ABE, who, as courteously as he can, moves from one to another group with AGATHA, who has his arm. Some pump ABE's free hand furiously, while others take it gingerly to congratulate him. While many in the crowd are strangers, we recognize others who are not, and they too wait to shake ABE's hand. BILL SHUCK, SAM PAGE and TOM KNIGHT are there with their wives, and SUSAN and CARL LOCKWOOD are on the fringe: those two are now very old indeed, and SUSAN is blind. Also on the fringe, standing near the Lockwoods, is ADRIANUS BLACK, very nearly abnormally short in stature; he is also very fat and owns a shaggy head of gray hair; he is in his middle fifties; he smiles with superb good humor.)

SUSAN (to CARL). I cannot see him, but I can hear his voice cast a shadow.

ADRIANUS (turning to SUSAN). Do you know him, madame? Adrianus Black addresses you; politician, industrialist, amorist, inventor, thief and altogether a midget.

SUSAN (smiling sweetly). I cannot believe the Creator fashioned man's thumb to be at himself in a perpetual fever of index!

CARL (crustily). Do not tax her, Mister Black. I am enough for that.

SUSAN (chidingly, to CARL). Come, let men be as they see themselves: distortion heals the wound of being. (to ADRIANUS) I knew Abe merely born, and later when he returned to seek his parents' graves. (to CARL) Abe is in a field of hubub, isn't he?

CARL (choleric). His wife bears up well under his strain!

SUSAN (chuckling). I cannot accept your qualifications to judge more than one wife!

CARL (laughing). And at those you have long hesitated.

(SUSAN momentarily touches his head with hers. ADRIANUS smiles gently.)

ADRIANUS. Did he find those graves, madame?

(SUSAN answers, but it is lost in a sudden protesting roar from

a man talking to ABE, HENRY SHERWOOD. But ADRIANUS has heard, and he frowns.)

SHERWOOD (*roaring, to ABE*). Slavery corrupts, sir, and compromise corrupts absolutely—in that it is slave to more than one master!

ABE. When oppositions are compelled to see fragments of each other, each becomes part free.

SHERWOOD. As an Abolitionist, I must tell Boston that you beg the question.

ABE. Tell Boston what you please. Tell them I do indeed beg the question, for answers are alms, and more often than not grudgingly given, too often satisfying the giver's grudge, that the beggar rejects most as counterfeit charity.

(*ENTER SARAH, MARY and MATTHEW CLOWN; they, too, try to press toward ABE.*)

SHERWOOD. I protest, Mister Gray—

ABE. Yes, yes, we must all protest—

(*A MR. TOXALL tugs at ABE's sleeve.*)

MR. TOXALL. Mister Gray—

ABE (*to SHERWOOD*). He successfully tugs my ear-sleeve, sir—

(*SHERWOOD bows coldly and EXITS*).

MR. TOXALL (*breathlessly*). Name's Toxall, youngest son by the name of Harry—

ABE (*to AGATHA*). Spittin' image of his son, ain't he, Agatha?

(*AGATHA laughs in spite of herself.*)

ABE (*to TOXALL*). He slept in my command in the Black Hawk War, and now he's getting along in years—your years, Mister Toxall.

MR. TOXALL. Men voted for you for all kinds of reasons, Mister President. If necessary, my son Harry would've awoke as a hero.

(*ABE roars with laughter and extends his hand, which TOXALL shakes warmly.*)

ABE. I will direct my secretary to awaken your son to one of the more heroic Washington agencies.

(*TOXALL grins delightedly and EXITS. ABE turns to AGATHA.*)

ABE. I have noted abolitionists here as well as human beings.

AGATHA (*tartly*). Opinions are far more difficult to check at

the door than people!

ABE. I think I will be able to hate you, Agatha, which will be a relief from people.

(An AIDE comes up to ABE.)

AIDE. Mister Gray, Mister Adrianus Black wishes to pay respects and requests to see you privately—

ABE *(interrupting)*. Where is he?

(The AIDE points to where BLACK is standing. BLACK inclines his head. ABE smiles grimly.)

ABE *(to the AIDE)*. I own no luxurious privacies that he can share for the next few days—

AGATHA *(sharply interrupting)*. You are discourteous to the Party Whip.

ABE. No, madame, very courteous: I delay wielding him.

AIDE. Your pardon, sir, but Mister Black asked me to stress with some urgency a matter of a Cabinet list.

ABE. You may inform Adrianus that I have already composed the list.

(The AIDE bears this message to ADRIANUS, who smiles and continues to wait patiently. The party of BILL SHUCK, TOM KNIGHT, SAM PAGE and their wives burst into a whoop and holler, shouting "Abe Gray, Abe Gray, best damn rassler in the USA" and wedge themselves through the crowd to surround ABE and AGATHA.)

SAM PAGE. Best of three falls, this decides. Remember, Abe?

SCENE 21

(BARTENDER and BONE. CHRISTINE BONE, Gordon's sister, ENTERS.)

CHRISTINE *(to BONE)*. Will he?

BARTENDER *(to BONE)*. Will I what? Who is she?

BONE. A sister, younger than I, but she passes me.

CHRISTINE *(to BARTENDER)*. You fought with Robertson.

BARTENDER *(shrugging)*. I don't serve whisky to the past.

CHRISTINE. Your place is closest to the theater, and you have horses. You will have one saddled for my brother when he leaves his work.

BARTENDER. What work?

CHRISTINE (*to BONE*). Have you not convinced him? (*to BARTENDER*) He means to murder Gray.

BARTENDER. I told him I did not know if I could aid him if he himself could not be sure he would assassinate.

(CHRISTINE *turns menacingly on BONE*.)

SCENE 22

(*A dim light. There are three Negroes running with one white man. Hounds bay in the distance. The figures drop to the ground, huddling.*)

OFFSTAGE VOICES. —Liza Property, get back here!

—Melancthus Property, we're gonna smell you out!

—Praise-be Property, we're gonna make a bonfire outa you soso we can light up all the other runaway Niggers!

—What nigger-lover out there's got our Propertys?

—Property—

—Property—

—Git the Propertys!

(*The figures huddled on the ground speak in low voices. MELANCTHUS PROPERTY is the father, PRAISE-BE is his wife, LIZA is his daughter. MISTER THIMBALL is the white man.*)

MELANCTHUS. How much more we gotta run?

THIMBALL. Five hundred yards south—is north.

MELANCTHUS. My belly wont go no more. I got stutterin guts.

LIZA. I want to spread my legs an give up.

PRAISE-BE. That's your mouth you're talkin about, Liza, but you aint got adjusted yet. (*turning to THIMBALL*) I wish I had the Church with me: that's where you get proportion, like God.

THIMBALL. When we stop, you will have your church.

PRAISE-BE. Thank you, Mister Thimball.

OFFSTAGE VOICES (*in unison*). Git the Propertys!

MELANCTHUS. Anybody got a root I could chew on? Christ, we sure are your comic thieves: we aint meant to be crucified. You got a root to chew on, Mister Thimball? I wish I could pick food like cotton right now: it would hush my fear.

THIMBALL. When we stop, you will have food and no fear.

OFFSTAGE VOICES (*in unison*). We gonna burn our Propertys

if we gitim! These Propertys no good to us no more!

MELANCTHUS. Can't we dig an hide deeper, Mister Thimball? Can't I paint my face white and hide in the sun, Mister Thimball?

PRAISE-BE. God is rockin on the porch for us, Melancthus, soon's we get north. We gonna stop there and gossip with the Lord!

MELANCTHUS. Why you doin this for us, Mister Thimball?

THIMBALL. I receive a handsome fee for each live Negro I deliver. But it's not for you to take my fee seriously: only for Thaddeus Thimball. The men who employ me as agent are your friends. Five hundred yards south—is north. You understand that?

LIZA. I liked the way the white boys got off their proud horses for me. (*exultantly*) They hadda get off their horses for me—I dream of a line of empty curvin saddles—

(PRAISE-BE *slaps her daughter across the mouth.*)

PRAISE-BE. I know where I shoulda stuffed the cotton—not in your ears—

THIMBALL (*to MELANCTHUS*). You understand? You ready?

MELANCTHUS. No—

THIMBALL. South.

MELANCTHUS. Back there I knew what to expect.

PRAISE-BE. You aint outwitted the Lord yet! An even He dont know what to expect because He created us with that gift—His gift to us of not knowin what to expect from us—otherwise He wouldna been such a sublimity!

THIMBALL. For the Lord and my agent's fee. You have your breath back now.

MELANCTHUS. It just now took shelter in me. It never woulda come back to me if it knew it hadda go out again.

LIZA. Daddy, you aint gonna let the Lord hurt me, are you?

MELANCTHUS. The days is gone, child, when we could jus fear the Lord. (*to THIMBALL*) Name's Property—

THIMBALL (*impatiently*). Come on, man—

MELANCTHUS (*restraining him*). That name given us by the owners. Dont know what our real name is. I'd like to know what my real name is. Clean forgot, maybe not so clean. Because I forgot the tongue I came from. Maybe that's a curse on me—

PRAISE-BE. You ain't got no memory cept for God.

MELANCTHUS. But I remember a lot of little gods before Him—an alla of a sudden in the South they got to be all in one God. How's that? Maybe God's easier to remember that way—

THIMBALL. We're losing time. I've got to deliver.

MELANCTHUS. All of us'll be delivered—who gets the fee? Judas?

THIMBALL. Nobody's here to betray us—

MELANCTHUS. Mister Thimball there's too many trees hereabouts—I aint familiar with this land—

THIMBALL. I'm familiar.

(The baying of the hounds is louder. The OFFSTAGE VOICES are closer.)

OFFSTAGE VOICES *(in unison)*. Git the Propertys!

MELANCTHUS. That's it! They gonna lose their properties. We gotta own ourselves. We gotta write down our new names. We gotta sit down an be registered. We gotta pay for things we wanna own. We gotta disagree with anything we dont like. We gotta say we like things when we like em. We got to get mortgages an deeds an transfers an sell an buy an lose an gain an speculate! Yessir, we gotta speculate!

(He stands up.)

THIMBALL. Get down for Christ's sake!

MELANCTHUS *(turning to THIMBALL)*. Now let's get on an speculate, Mister Thimball!

THIMBALL. Follow me—quickly!

(The PROPERTYS run with THIMBALL leading, but as they EXIT the OFFSTAGE VOICES scream in triumph. A BAND OF MEN with flaming torches ENTER, and the hounds OFFSTAGE bay in crescendo.)

THE MEN. —Aint no more'n two hundred yards—

—That's the Propertys—an they gotta nigger-lover with em!

—Let's git after em!

—South—

—South—

—South—

(The BAND OF MEN EXIT.)

SCENE 23

(Scene 20, continued. Except that the crowd of men and women of all types has grown larger, more noisy. They all surge about ABE, seeking to touch him, exchange a few words, petition him for one thing and another. AGATHA tries to fend each one off as quickly as possible, but is for the most part unsuccessful.)

ADRIANUS *(to SUSAN)*. Not at all, Mrs. Lockwood. It is not ethics that complicates the slavery issue, but—

(His words are lost as BILL SHUCK, pounding ABE's back, roars out.)

BILL SHUCK. Still got those back muscles in you like a charge of lean bulls!

SAM PAGE. You're gonna need a good referee in Washington, Abe.

ABE. A referee in Washington is the man at the bottom of the heap, Sam—he's the stompin' ground of prejudice. Why I once knew a sculptor who was tryin to make a statue of a referee, he was gonna immortalize him as the highest type of the human race, but when he started lookin aroun for a model all he could find was a little bit here an a mite there, each little piece of a model referee in the possession of as many people. Well, now, that was all right, the sculptor thought, because all he hadda do was buy up all the pieces an assemble them an he'd have him a model he could work from, but when he tried buyin the pieces—not a human soul'd part from his or her bit, they were that jealous of ownin a precious particle of the referee!

(The crowd chuckles.)

TOM KNIGHT. Now that referee's name couldn't be Abe Gray, could it?

ABE. No siree! That was the sculptor's!

(The crowd roars.)

AGATHA *(in low tones, to ABE)*. You've sweated yourself up enough with the people, Abe, I think you should retire for the night.

ABE. Get out of here, Agatha, if the trample disturbs your feet. Your sense should plummet to the fact that when the people put

their hands on me and chop me this way and that, I twist to them this way and that to recover my members, for only then am I neither angered nor impassioned with them but seek only to re-constitute myself among them in a glory of repossession—

AGATHA. A sensual puppetry indeed!

ABE. If orthodox orgy takes place in me at all, it is among the crowd—

A WOMAN (*shouting*). What will you do if the southern states threaten to secede?

ABE (*shouting back*). I am for the moment entertaining my wife, madame. Belong to yourself a little longer. (*to AGATHA*) What is your desire, Agatha? You demanded I take you here on my arm. Are you jealous of the impersonalities that surround me? Go and identify them, if you will, and scream at them. Not many moments ago you preferred the sport—

AGATHA. There is a limit—

ABE (*interrupting*). God save you, Agatha, there is no limit! In the Presidency of the United States there is no limit except to be struck dead by it! The people will hear no limit; they flock to behold the man of no limits!

SAM PAGE. You are too long with your lady, Abe!

ABE (*laughing*). I heard no complaint, Sam!

(*Some women in the crowd draw their breaths sharply, and others laugh with complete unrestraint.*)

ABE (*turning again to AGATHA*). You smelled out my sweat, Agatha, that I constrained myself to scrub off, that, icy away from the people, heats up in their multitude, that you yourself are rank with, and with which you wish yourself involved as well, towards which you cudgelled and compelled me, but as you are insufficiently gross you cannot tolerate a flesh-memento torn from you here, and another there, and are repelled by the many examining the trophies of your self that they have torn from you and cackle over in the gossiping light, and therefore you would go back to the sitting-room, the bedroom, the attic and the cellar, while I in the essence never having condemned myself to any finished self-formulation can give here and there of myself as anyone pleases in the coming waves of architecture. There will be enough antemeridians in which

I will alone at a desk circumnavigate many magellans of terror—

AGATHA (*icily interrupting*). You will do me the honor of bidding me goodnight when you return.

ABE (*beckoning to an AIDE*). See that Mrs. Gray returns to her quarters in safety.

(*The AIDE and AGATHA EXIT as the Crowd makes way for them.*)

ABE (*addressing the Crowd*). Well, now, come on and shake my hand—I got enough callouses to last the whole lot of you!

BILL SHUCK. Now there's a man for ya—he gits more stooped each time I see him, but he's taller'n ever!

A MAN. Now you lissen here, Mister President-Elect, my name is Jessup Jackson, an I got a son Charlie your age that whacked rails with you on the Border—

ABE. I'm mighty glad you got to get here, Jessup Jackson, because I used to admire you up an down the sling of my spine when you spit tobacco-juice ten feet to knock out a rabbit's eyes better'n a shotgun. How's Charlie?

JESSUP JACKSON. Charlie's raisin wheat an he's got two fine chuckalong sons one fourteen an one fifteen an me an him voted for you, Abe, but I'm here to make sure you aint gonna pull away those grandsons of mine an make them hafta fight a war over some dumb niggers!

SCENE 24

(CHRISTINE and BONE).

CHRISTINE. Impossible!

BONE. I tell you I must debate him first. We come to what esteem we have—by debate.

CHRISTINE (*mockingly*). The parliamentary murderer!

BONE. Well, I will dissolve it! Therefore, let him speak. Sister—bone of my Bone!

CHRISTINE. We boasted properties. You are reduced to the income of prompters. Your sister the whore will wisely walk a beat outside the theatre—I will know how to cue my customers in!

BONE. Will you cue death in for me?

CHRISTINE. I'll do it myself if you whiten to it—

BONE (*laughing*). You could lift the heavy male instrument for one purpose alone—

CHRISTINE (*interrupting*). You shuffle levels like a deck of cards. You speak of killing, and then a fantasy of disputation prior to it. What theatre will you inhabit? If there be people in it, and your weapon more than a distant steel shape from an iron rancor, they will spring on you as on spoiled meat and outlaw your eyes from their sockets and hang you by your own exarobesqued nerves from the top of the stage—

BONE (*interrupting*). They will hear us both! They will take out all their weapon clocks and lay them down. I will debate him first. Did you know the other day he passed me on the street?

CHRISTINE. He has passed many.

BONE. And nodded?

CHRISTINE. Yes.

BONE. What's a tipping of a finger?

CHRISTINE. Nearly nothing.

BONE. He tipped no finger to me. And I wore no disguise.

CHRISTINE. He has not seen you play. He will.

BONE. He must recognize me as his assassin.

CHRISTINE. And stop you.

BONE (*quietly*). Let him.

CHRISTINE. Why then rise to the attempt?

BONE. That he see the attempt of one man upon another's life.

CHRISTINE. He may smile at your so valuing it.

BONE. That disclaimer would be cowardice.

CHRISTINE. Then you do not expect cowardice?

BONE. I expect anything of large men, and he expects everything will come to him—even murder.

CHRISTINE. And you will kill him for his arrogance.

BONE. I will kill him for his everything.

CHRISTINE. But debate him first.

BONE. Yes.

CHRISTINE. And risk his dissuading you—so that you could not kill him for anything.

BONE. Oh—there will be something he will omit and that will be everything!

CHRISTINE. And no one will touch you till you are done?

BONE. No one.

CHRISTINE. This is a grisly grandeur of some sort, but whether it belongs to Gray or you I don't know. Both of you now seem to spring out of my childhood, as though this were a late story told me by a dark mother of storm. You said though I was younger I passed you. But I am a gangling threat compared to yours, and you are so aged a brother that you father me out of sight. There is nothing so dangerous as an actor gone mad: he thinks he plays but the role of himself—an utterly impossible task—

BONE. Because a man does not know what he is—

CHRISTINE. A man never knows what he is.

BONE. Therefore I must kill—out of pique!

CHRISTINE (*backing away from him; giggling*). The South murders—out of pique! I will grow up on that!

BONE. Yes—grow up—out of pique. Love, hate, laugh, weep—out of pique, that we cannot know what we are—

CHRISTINE. This is not my childhood—I cannot believe that Gray will order no one to touch you—

BONE (*yelling exultantly*). Watch from the wings!

(CHRISTINE *backs away and slowly EXITS.*)

BONE (*yelling*). I say watch from the wings!

(*The BARTENDER ENTERS.*)

BONE (*very quietly*). I shall kill the President. Will you aid me?

SCENE 25

(*Scene 23, continued.*)

ABE (*roaring back at a man in the crowd*). What was that?

A MAN. When you are in Washington, I say, think of the people, of their life and death—

ABE. Do you think me a miracle, sir?

THE SAME MAN. I ask a plain answer—

ABE (*sardonically*). Plain! plain!

TOM KNIGHT. Contain yourself, Abe—

ABE (*to TOM*). There is no containment with the people. They ask me to shelter myself under adrenalin umbrellas— (*shouting*

back to the MAN) By the time a man becomes a miracle to think of the miracle of life and death, he cuts a figure like a saint trying to unlace his heavy boots with fingers become wings. Attempt that, if you will!

JESSUP JACKSON. Will you go to war over the niggers?

A SENATOR. That will be decided on the floor of the Houses of Congress—

JESSUP JACKSON. I asked it of the man who's gotta say yea or nay—

ABE. We will not go to war over color—

JESSUP JACKSON. What *will* you go to war on?

A GOVERNOR. You have no right to disturb the President-elect by requesting reply to a matter involving policy delicate in the extreme—I am his host, the Governor of the State—

JESSUP JACKSON. My sons' lives aint horses' asses either, Governor—

SARAH CLOWN. My husband was hanged at Atlantic Ferry in his lust to free the Negro and deliver him from color—

MARY CLOWN (*interrupting, to her mother*). We're here to pay a man homage, and you give birth to a dead husband—

ABE. Your husband, Mrs. Clown, assaulted federal property and as such dug a wound into the consent of the governed and the agreement of the living that cope this commonwealth together—that the ground they designate is earth and construction of the several and not some symbolic lure for one man to despoil as he judges it some fantastic and feverish thigh parched for his bayoneting authority—

SARAH CLOWN. He gave his life for the desiccate and damned of this nation—

ABE. I knew him not a year before—

SARAH. And hoisted cowardice on your tall pole when he would enlist you—

ABE. He formed his own family as his movement's core when he could not simplify their mouths' hunger by food. He made you fanatics when he could not feed you. He maddened you when he could not live with you sane. Whose was the cowardice—that of your angel of idiocy or mine?—when, locked in the knowledge

that he could not shatter a nation into fragments regrouping upon him, and terror-trapped that he might graze upon a pasturing oblivion alive, he chose yellow martyrdom—he slobbered over blood to assure that history slip and fall over him—(*turning to the crowd*) and left three survivors—his wife Sarah, his daughter Mary, and his youngest son Matthew—

MATTHEW. But there was infinity in his attack—

ABE. Admire him to infinity, then! I will not lead a country to it. These United States lead their own immortality.

MATTHEW. It is not often that men can follow in faultless sacrifice—

ABE. I would not go to Washington if the electorate thought me capable of faultless sacrifice: I should commit suicide! Sacrifice gains naught but the awe of the ignorant, from which jaw-drop only yawns can issue.

MARY (*calling out*). I wish the tall man well in Washington—

(*ABE smiles at her as she leads her mother and brother to EXIT.*)

NORTHERN REPRESENTATIVE. What will you do on the question of Negro slavery?

SOUTHERN REPRESENTATIVE. What will you do if the Southern States secede?

ABE. Why should they secede?

S.R. On a majority of northern congressmen, who will move to legislate our Negro properties invalid. Who will move to legislate Negro equality.

ADRIANUS (*to S.R.*). The North cannot economically compete with the South so long as the South utilizes free slave labor—

A MAN. In Washington, think of the people, of their life and death—

ABE (*snapping*). I could not possibly dissociate myself from the life and death of the people—

ADRIANUS (*to S.R.*). Your entire stand on the Negro question is an economic one. You stand to lose your markets once you begin to pay Northern wages to your blacks—

ABE (*interrupting*). I will not think of Negro slavery in economic terms.

ADRIANUS. How *will* you think of it, Mister President?

GOVERNOR. I believe the President means to say he will think of it in all possible terms—

ADRIANUS. No question, really, is reflected on in all possible terms. In order to reflect at all, we must choose the most salient feature. In this case, it is the economic.

NORTHERN REPRESENTATIVE. Greece foundered because she could not extend her democracy to her slave group, which had no voice in the economic problems besetting the country.

ADRIANUS. Slaves are not this country's largest group, and we are not beset by economic problems threatening our extinction. We will not expire if the South keeps her slaves, but economic devastation may rot the North.

S.R. I have no objection to the North owning Negroes and employing them on the land and in the factory.

ADRIANUS. You lie, sir. You know we will not have them slaves in the North.

ABE. Then it seems a question of libertarian principle for the North, and a question of economic necessity for the South.

S.R. No sir. We use the Negro as slave because of his inferiority to the white.

ABE. Do you call the white man of the North your inferior as well because he consorts with the Negro on an equal level?

S.R. It is impossible for the northerner to think of the Negro with any reality until he has lived with him.

N.R. Live with him as you do? or as we intend him to live with us?

S.R. We live with him as he desires us to. A man is a slave so long as he does not rebel against his master. You white men of the North may count yourselves the superior of the Negro if only on the ground that you and you alone cause his rebellions. We neither hate nor fear the Negro, gentlemen, but fear and hate the hypocrisy of the white man who is too guilty to fornicate with the Negress at his will, too guilty to feed a human animal enough only to work his fields and rise the following morning to work them again without pay, without hope, without lies of immortality. You white men of the North believe you must pay for your pleasures.

We of the South refuse to pay for ours—

ABE (*pounding on a table*). It is no hypocrisy to observe, sir, that there are those human animals whose pleasure it is to eliminate the pleasures of others!

(*There is an absolute silence. ADRIANUS is the first to break and take ABE's arm: he would lead him out of the room. And ADRIANUS and ABE take a few steps, but the REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SOUTH crosses to block them.*)

S.R. (*to ABE, very quietly*). Am I to understand what you have just said to be a statement of policy?

(*SUSAN LOCKWOOD steps forward, her husband CARL guiding her.*)

JESSUP JACKSON (*shouting*). Answer him, Abe!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD. —Give him a clear answer!

—No tall tales, Abe!

—Tell him what we want to hear, Abe!

SUSAN LOCKWOOD (*spiritedly, to S.R.*). I am a blind woman, sir—

ABE (*astonished to see her; interrupting*). Mrs. Lockwood. Mrs. Lockwood, you need not—

S.R. (*interrupting*). Who is this shambles? (*to SUSAN*) Madame, this is no place to perform alms—

SUSAN (*interrupting, to S.R.*). I am not ashamed to use my blindness or my cane-tapping years to gain the alms of attention, sir, and to point out to the distinguished representative from the South that the pleasures of Mister Abe Gray lie buried in a southern state, and that to this day he does not know where to find them.

(*BLACKOUT.*)

SCENE 26

(*Scene 22, continued. The scene is dimly lit. Four ropes hang from the flies, with hangman's nooses at their ends. Each noose is about twelve feet from the ground; under each stand MELANCTHUS, PRAISE-BE, LIZA and THIMBALL, who are STAGE RIGHT. At STAGE LEFT is a band of men carrying torches. OFFSTAGE, can be heard the mournful sounds of the baying hounds. The PROPERTIES have their hands tied behind their backs, as does*

THIMBALL. LIZA *cannot stop her uncontrollable shivering.*)

MELANCTHUS (*with a short chuckle, to THIMBALL*). We speculated.

PRAISE-BE (*to LIZA*). Quit your shakin; it could scare away Jesus Christ.

LIZA (*to her mother*). It's the last thing I got in me, an it's runnin out.

(*The BAND OF MEN laugh.*)

ONE MAN. Shame we just can't keep em under those ropes an come here every Saturday night for a show.

A SECOND MAN. Come on, let's kill em an burn em an then put up a sign: What Happens When You Trespass Our Propertys.

A THIRD MAN. I'm in no hurry. I like to watch that there Liza Property shake. I could get out my jew's-harp an twang it while she sets a trap for my loins.

THE SECOND MAN. I want to watch the niggers die: that's good enough for my loins!

THIMBALL (*spitting*). What are you using me for?—white sauce for black meat?

(*The FIRST MAN slowly walks over to THIMBALL and rapidly passes his torch over THIMBALL's face. THIMBALL whimpers and starts to fall, but the FIRST MAN catches him and steadies him, and then backs away while THIMBALL continues to whimper.*)

THE FIRST MAN (*quietly*). I'll answer your question, Mister Thimball. We're just gonna hang you an nothin else sose you can be a white sign pointin to the niggers—that's so nobody'll lose his way anymore. It's true a man loses his way soon as he dies, but there's no sense doin it alive.

(*The THIRD MAN goes over to LIZA and passes his torch across her feet. She screams and keeps screaming.*)

THE THIRD MAN. Shake! Liza Property—shake it so they come fallin down under your dress an roll on out so I can run after em an pounce on em an hang em from a Christmas tree!

A FOURTH MAN. Make her quit her screamin: it thins out my blood.

(*The THIRD MAN puts his fingers around Liza's throat and squeezes till her screaming ends in a gasp; then he lets go, and she*

breathes stertorously.)

THE THIRD MAN (*to the FOURTH*). Thicker now?

THE FOURTH MAN. Uh-huh.

THE FIRST MAN (*to MELANCTHUS*). We don't like our Propertys leavin us, Melancthus. Very unsettlin for a human being havin his Propertys runnin away. It aint right. Propertys outa be grateful they're owned. How many things in this here world can boast they're owned? I can't, for instance. We been doin you niggers a favor.

(*The FIRST MAN turns to the others of the band.*)

THE FIRST MAN (*continuing*). Aint we been doin them a favor?

THE SECOND MAN. Why sure, we beat em so they could make songs that'd make us cry. It's a hard thing for a man to cry, but those niggers could sure lead us to weepin. We don't wanna lose that there weepin—niggers make cryin easy for us.

A FIFTH MAN. An what are we gonna do without them bein here an hatin us? Everywhere we walk, they hate us—where else can a two-bit man be a Lord, hated unto murder by his black people? Makes a man feel the world is rubbin its hands right under his belly. I aint gonna give up my Propertys!

THE BAND OF MEN (*in unison, chanting*). Wont give up the Propertys—wont give up the Propertys—wont give up the Propertys—

THE FIRST MAN. You got somethin to say, Melancthus?

MELANCTHUS. We speculated.

THE FIRST MAN. What for?

MELANCTHUS. To be a little bit like you.

THE FIRST MAN. But that's wrong! Why'd you wanna be like us for? We gotta keep things, an because we gotta do that we gotta get more things to surround the things we keep, and then possess more protection for those—an then lie to everybody sayin we got plenty, we don't need anymore—don't you understand, Melancthus?

MELANCTHUS. No—

THE FIRST MAN. I'm beggin you to understand—

MELANCTHUS. No—

(*The FIRST MAN kneels before MELANCTHUS.*)

THE FIRST MAN. If you can beg on your knees for mercy like I'm beggin on my knees to you to understand, why I might get the men here to reconsider killin you. I might get them all to go home, an you come with us, because right down deep in our hearts we don't want to burn up our Propertys, now do we?

(*The FIRST MAN twists his neck toward the BAND OF MEN.*)

THE FIRST MAN (*to the BAND OF MEN*). Do we?

(*There is a chorus of agreement from the BAND OF MEN.*)

THE FIRST MAN (*to MELANCTHUS*). So you jus get down on your knees an beg for mercy! You an Praise-Be an Liza. Sure, we'll all kneel—we're all God-fearin men.

(*The FIRST MAN turns to his BAND OF MEN.*)

THE FIRST MAN. Get down on your knees an raise your voices petitionin the Propertys to beg for mercy!

(*The BAND OF MEN solemnly kneel.*)

THE BAND OF MEN (*chanting, in unison*). Beg for mercy for Christ's sake—beg for mercy for Christ's sake—

(*LIZA falls to her knees.*)

THE FIRST MAN. An a little child shall lead them!

PRAISE-BE. What the Bible really means is a little child shall lead only other children! The Bible thought it was talkin to grown-ups who'd understand that!

THE FIRST MAN. Mister Thimball!

(*THIMBALL continues to whimper softly.*)

THE FIRST MAN. Mister Thimball can you hear me?

THIMBALL (*softly*). Yes.

THE FIRST MAN. Well, then—I want you to open your eyes so you can get down on your knees and beg for mercy. You must open your eyes to balance yourself down to kneel.

THIMBALL (*softly*). I'm afraid. My eyes hurt. They feel sticky.

THE FIRST MAN (*to MELANCTHUS*). Get down, or I will force Mister Thimball to open his eyes.

THIMBALL (*softly*). Please, Propertys.

MELANCTHUS (*softly*). We cannot.

THE FIRST MAN. Mister Thimball—your eyes or the torch!

(*THIMBALL opens his eyes and gives a piercing scream and falls forward to lie prone, his bound hands clawing at the ground.*)

THE THIRD MAN. Mercy or the rope, Propertyts!

MELANCHTHUS. Abe Gray'll make Satan's jelly outa you by fire and sword!

THE FIRST MAN (*bursting into laughter*). Abe Gray's gonna save the Union, he ain't gonna save the niggers! Abe Gray's gonna win the war an then he's gonna die right after an we're gonna do what we goddamn please to the nigger down here, an mosta the niggers are gonna stay right down here, mosta the niggers gonna be yella to go up north where they can be free, they're gonna stay here where we can lynch em an kerosene em an burn em like we're gonna do to you if you don't beg for mercy, an we're gonna fornicate with em an make a fine white race outa them so they can be a people the United States of America is gonna be proud of because we aint gonna let you stay all black, we're gonna cohabit the black hell outa you so there aint gonna be a trace of you left in America, nosiree, that's what we're gonna do to you an Abe Gray an all the people like him aint gonna be able to do a goddamn thing about it, now waddya think of that, Propertyts.

PRaise-BE. We die black!

(*The BAND OF MEN rise.*)

THE THIRD MAN. Give em the rope! Kerosene em an burn em!

THE FIRST MAN (*shouting to OS*). Lower the ropes!

(*The ropes are lowered. THIMBALL is jerked to his feet, whimpering, and his head placed in a noose. The same is done to LIZA as she shakes convulsively and shrieks unremittingly. The same is done to PRAISE-BE and MELANCHTHUS who make absolutely no move. Then the nooses are tightened. One of the BAND OF MEN goes OS and returns with a bucket of kerosene and douses THIMBALL, PRAISE-BE and MELANCHTHUS in turn.*)

THE FIRST MAN. Got anything you wanna say, Propertyts?

MELANCHTHUS. Got plenty, and it's all love, yessir! Love! Us niggers with the kinky brains love the long blond ropes of the white man, yessir! Love you with our teeth, we do! The teeth that loved to be a tusk rippin white outa the toilet-sweats you squirmed our guts in bringin us on the ships from Africa—love you, man, love you! Loved you showin us off on the auction-blocks of your ten million shrugs—loved you for believin we was gonna live, never

mind the gritty plugs of crawlin food for the hummin holes of our bellies an never mind your whips ahoppin an askippin on our backs carryin blood piggyback! an never mind waterin the land with our sweat—love you, white man, love you! for believing we gonna raise our sexins an make a black whory road leadin to ten thousan Jerusalems in your United States of America! Love you, we niggers say, for cheatin us and pissin us an laughin at us an pityin us for leak-headed John Henrys that looked grown up but was just a beanstalk pickaninny! We love you, white man—yessir!—love you for bein scared we gonna make alla you black while you're goin aroun boastin you're gonna make us white an love you cause we are gonna be white but you're gonna be scared alla time you gonna change into black an then some poor nigger who got to be white is gonna come up to one of your poor white souls in your black flesh and is gonna lynch the white screamin hell outa you an you gonna be dead—dead—now that's somethin Mister White Man we just cant get over lovin and lovin an—

(Just before MELANCETHUS comes to his last word The FIRST MAN gives a signal OFFSTAGE, THE LIGHTS BLACKOUT so that only the torches are seen, a concerted snap is heard, MELANCETHUS' speech suddenly stops, LIZA's screaming stops, THIMBALL's whimpering stops, and a ghastly creaking as of the sudden wrench and pull of ropes holding heavy weights. Then, suddenly, the stage is ripped vertical-wise by four blinding columns of fire, and we can see the BAND OF MEN dropping their torches and dispersing as if pursued by the Furies.)

THE BAND OF MEN *(shrieking in unison with the sound dying away in a ghastly effect)*. PROPERTY! . . .

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 27

(In the dim light, the four children of ABE and AGATHA GRAY are sitting up in each of their four beds, REBECCA, AMY, SILAS and ALAN, seven, eight, ten and eleven years of age, respectively. They are silent and solemn. AGATHA and ABE GRAY ENTER, carrying lighted candles.)

AGATHA. Children—why aren't you sleeping?

AMY. Well, I keep thinking it's such a white house—

SILAS (*interrupting, scornfully*). It's only white outside.

AMY But everything is outside, Silas, everything! It's just you keep carrying it inside. I can't fall asleep because I like colors.

REBECCA. I'm glad you made a speech today, daddy.

ABE. Why?

REBECCA. Well, after that they let us in!

ALAN (*to REBECCA*). They'd have to anyhow!

REBECCA (*challengingly*). Why would they have to anyhow?

ALAN (*with tremendous pride*). Because Dad's the President of the United States of America. (*then, a little disturbed at his boldness*) Aren't you, daddy?

(*ABE laughs, and AGATHA joins him.*)

ABE. Yes.

SILAS. Mommy—you say so too.

AGATHA (*very quietly*). Your father is the President of the United States.

AMY (*prompting her*). Of America!

(*AGATHA smiles.*)

REBECCA. Then we must be the children of the United States of America.

SILAS (*accusingly, to ABE*). We ought to see the country more often.

ABE (*smiling*). We will have to content ourselves with the country seeing us more often.

AGATHA (*to the children*). I think it's time you were asleep.—Come, Abe.

REBECCA. Wait just a minute—please?

ABE. What is it, Rebecca?

REBECCA. Who are we? We hardly ever see you.

ALAN (*to ABE*). What she means is, we're sure we know who *you* are, but we're not so sure you know who *we* are.

AGATHA. Your father is very busy.

AMY. So is any father.

ABE (*softly, to AGATHA, with a smile*). Isn't it enough to have children? Must one be introduced to them as well?

AGATHA. Parents should always introduce themselves to children—to give the children the chance to reject them.

SILAS (*to ABE*). Will you be telling the people what to do now?

ABE (*to AGATHA*). We'd better say goodnight. Real children overwhelm me totally: I don't have to make myself clear to them.

ALAN. Will there be war, dad?

(A SERVANT ENTERS.)

THE SERVANT. Mister Adrianus Black is in the foyer.

(ABE *nods*, and the SERVANT EXITS.)

ABE (*to the children*). Goodnight, children.

THE CHILDREN (*overlapping each other*). Goodnight, Daddy.

(ABE and AGATHA cross toward EXIT.)

ABE (*as if to himself, as a reminder*). Rebecca, Amy, Silas and Alan. Rebecca . . . Amy . . . Silas . . . Alan . . .

(ABE and AGATHA EXIT.)

SCENE 28

(ABE and ADRIANUS ENTER.)

ADRIANUS. Men committed to war will seek every means to avert it. The men you have chosen for your Cabinet, who are unalterably opposed to war, will seek every means to declare it. Moulton, Carmody, Firth, Hoskins, Harming—

ABE. The Congress will confirm them.

ADRIANUS. I fear so.

ABE. How are your mistresses?

ADRIANUS. Non-political, Mister President.

(GRAY gives a great laugh.)

ADRIANUS. How are your children?

ABE. Non-political, Adrianus. Is there a moral?

ADRIANUS. I am not so much a fabulist as to discern one either amongst mistresses or children. How is Mrs. Gray?

ABE. Married, I should say.

ADRIANUS. If I may return to less epic frailties than women and progeny—

ABE. Well?

ADRIANUS. You will accept none of my choices for the Cabinet?

ABE (*as he leads ADRIANUS to the EXIT*). Rebecca, Amy, Silas

and Alan. . . .

(ADRIANUS *stares at ABE oddly as they EXIT.*)

SCENE 29

(*ABE, alone, slowly pacing, back and forth. A moment passes, and then AGATHA ENTERS, distraught.*)

AGATHA. It was as if, sleeping, I was struck, to awaken stunned. Why were you not beside me?

ABE. Is it the headache?

AGATHA. It is like a bank I draw on, and into which thieves incessantly try to enter. Why were you not beside me? My throat is like a photographer's bulb, squeezing picture after picture. You must anticipate me, Abe, and remain beside me.

ABE. I thought I heard a trainwhistle, and arose to investigate the dream. When heads of state dream too much, it is unfortunate for the nation. Is it possible that, since the day affects our dreaming, our dreaming may affect the day?

AGATHA. I want you at my side.

ABE. A little later.

AGATHA. I ask it now.

ABE. I shall not be long.

AGATHA. There is an unknown body that sweats beside me. Your presence would pacify it.

ABE. I am not in this office to quiet my wife.

AGATHA. You were not elected to celibacy!

ABE. I have not determined what I have been elected to.

AGATHA. Inconclusiveness is the worst degeneracy.

ABE. So long as it obtains, yes, and only for the individual whom it afflicts. But it may nullify for the moment two antagonists, and call back the blood. I speak of the North and the South.

AGATHA. I know whom you speak of. I know whom I speak of.

ABE. Stupendous being! that knows what it speaks of.

AGATHA. In the making of four children, you are not done with me.

ABE. I am not done with you, but I have begun with other matters. They are not women.

AGATHA. I have wished that they might be. I am frightened: you

gorge on the nation—

ABE (*interrupting*). Nibble, nudge, circle, test—and pray it stay tentative.

AGATHA. You may love me—

ABE. It is true I have not been able to hate you as a relief from the people. They afford no relief—

AGATHA. But I cannot feel that you love me. Or that you love me strained through the close bones of Ann Hatcher—

ABE (*interrupting*). I forbid you to be jealous of the dead!

AGATHA. That is all that I can find to be jealous of! Let me then have those close bones. Do not cancel out the last possible object of my jealousy—else I think I should warp myself to fit madness' symmetry, for who should my husband be?

ABE. Who is he, madame?

AGATHA. Whatever I look on, there he is, and the swarm is too much for me. Does a friend inquire where I am? and I must say the White House, with the President. Is dinner to be done? and I must think on guests, a chief justice and his wife, a secretary of the treasury and his wife. Does someone demand the news? and I say the President does this and he does that, and that the country waits on his sorriest syllables—and shall I be greater than the country to wait only for the President's silences? How splendid does Agatha show herself—as the First Lady—

ABE. You had remarked contentment on that, once.

AGATHA. I had thought you might come to hate me, through which I might be intimate with you. Why can't you hate me? I should be finished with your dead Ann Hatcher then!

ABE. It is a way, perhaps, of keeping her before me. If I love you, I can do so only through one whom I loved. Can you not understand the dead to be a rehearsal for the living?

AGATHA. I needed no rehearsal to love you, nor need one now. I entreat you, Abe, not to consent to a second term when your first is done. Even if I should not have your love, I should hold to my reason by your life.

ABE. Have you heard the trainwhistle, Agatha?

AGATHA. These are cold nights, and the wind wears a long beard to which odd sounds may stick.

ABE. You imply that a second term might affect my life.

AGATHA. You become too long a single reference in the public mind for all effects, the simplified index for the lazy or bitter thumb which canny habit isolates from thought and consults to save others from hating-time. When men are short, you will loom conveniently. Promise me you will repudiate further nomination.

ABE. There are those who may deem me irreplaceable.

AGATHA. By that very judgment others may destroy you. And it is you, after all, who must determine replaceability.

ABE. We are certainly indispensable to ourselves as long as we can be.

AGATHA. In proportion as we are unnecessary for others.

ABE (*very softly*). For you?

AGATHA. I would prefer you exclude anyone you choose in order to insure yourself.

ABE. There are varieties of insurance.

AGATHA. But no more than a single life.

ABE. You are irreligious.

AGATHA. No—I am no egotist. Promise me.

ABE. When I shall have lived through my first term, I shall give my answer.

AGATHA (*softly, turning away*). You will have forgotten by then, and I will not want to remind you. I wish you could tell me now. (*turning to him again*) Tell me now, my beloved, so that either I may whiten my hair and practice on the hunting of ghosts to know them well and look on all the world in crystal fixity from the utter damnation of the diamond to the surfeit of perfect softness that white snow is, or wear warmth against the winter and count on color as the real wisdom of crystal, into which imperfect wealth all perfection must flaw that it live to be seen at least in part. Tell me now, that I be not half winter and half heat, prey both to the soundless hooves of apparitions and the insect feet of the clocks our bodies make, putting me in the frenzy of correcting my time this way and that—shall Abe be living or shall Abe be dead?

(*A voice is heard OS.*)

REBECCA (*OS*). Mother—

ABE. You have children—

AGATHA. I have none till your answer—

REBECCA (OS). Mother—I didn't hear you—

ABE. You have children—

AGATHA. A wife's husband is her first law—a law that she would alter, perhaps, abrogate, cancel, distort—say even that she distorts, cancels, abrogates, alters—but the law remains. I want your answer.

REBECCA (OS). Let me come to your bedroom, please—

ABE. For your children's sake, I have no answer—. Go to them.

AGATHA. Damn my children, they defeat me—children forever defeat their mothers when husbands send wives to them. May I not have your life?

ABE. I do not know who will have my life. It will be of consequence only to the individual who takes it—

AGATHA. I want you to take it—

ABE. Possession is nine-tenths of the flaw!

AGATHA. Be flawed for my love—

ABE. I am flawed for anyone's love—

AGATHA. Ah, Christ-beast that you are, crucified monster, wanton and behemoth of mercy—I know you, I know you, a tax-collector of thieves for the Cross, the wild bull of the spirit, whose gnashing tusks are his gentlest fingers—

REBECCA (OS). Mommy, please answer—

ABE. Go to them—

AGATHA (as she crosses toward EXIT, laughing hysterically). Exiled to my children—exiled to my children—

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 30

(ABE, alone.)

ABE. Come, antagonist, appear, advance, antagonize! My muscles mumble under stillness' mould, no barking iron thrust at them, no maxillary wrestler taunting cloture, no thieving threat, no misanthropic murder—no antagonist but a national chunk, a gob of aristocracy, a churling churn of people—what is the hurl of a single man against a collective huge? Nothing, if he have antipodal huge behind, he dots the crest, he winks the vertex and arches the already mastering architecture against a differing design. Where, then, is

my antagonist? My muscles root under themselves; the more subterranean, the more blind, become flabby fish, whose roots are languid ripples that grub at a wandering nerve: so, a piddle of flesh may ache, a feeble hook of chill in a bone now and then. I have progressed to a symbol! I am the king of a connotation and the emperor of a meaning, my crown worked from the common elements of all the emotions and balanced quixotically on my hairs that stand on end! Here in this consequence is the tragedy of man: that he represents and signifies: that never in his rise does he become cardinal in himself: that in proportion to his ascent he loses his own specific and is generalized, generalized, generalized! Abe Gray abstract, selected, curried of all that he was to be screwed as pliant stuff against the hauling, yanking, squirming, booming, wringing shape of all the men who love and hate him. I say I will spite my tragedy and yet give the nation tragic tombstone if I can find my antagonist and give him—give him Abe Gray!

SCENE 31

(The members of Abe Gray's Cabinet: ADRIANUS BLACK, MOULTON, CARMODY, FIRTH, HOSKINS and HARMING. They are seated. They rise as ABE GRAY ENTERS. He motions them to take their seats.)

ABE. Gentlemen, please.

(They take their seats.)

ABE. Gentlemen, southern guns have fired on Fort Winter.

CARMODY. I understand, Mister President, notwithstanding the gross possibility of misinterpretation on the part of the southern states, you flouted the majority opinion of this Cabinet and proceeded to issue orders which resulted in provisioning the diminishing stores of Fort Winter and relieving its garrison. Of our number here, only Hoskins and Moulton advised such an act. Am I correct?

ABE. You are correct, Mister Carmody.

CARMODY. The South, then, looked on your move as an act of aggression upon and opposition to the principle of the sovereignty of the separate states and the right of secession peaceably and at will based thereon.

ABE. I cannot quarrel with your observation.

CARMODY. Will you as well forego dissent from my corollary,

that you foresaw their hostility and provoked them to initiate fire so that with the redoubtable conscience of the sophisticated innocent you could have no recourse other than to retaliate by a declaration of war in all reverent political virginity.

ABE (*mildly*). Have you authenticated my declaration of war?

CARMODY. Will you vouch for it, Mister President?

ABE. For the moment, no vouchers.

CARMODY. Tomorrow? At the latest, by the end of the week? Will the spittoons of the north then ring with your declaration of war?

MOULTON. You are a knight in shining cowardice, Mister Carmody.

CARMODY. I do not carry my body as a swagger-stick, Mister Moulton.

HOSKINS (*to CARMODY*). Would you have had the men of the Fort Winter garrison swagger up their souls in belly-balloons in the long slack of sustenance?

CARMODY. We could have had them surrender. A garrison capitulant, Mister Hoskins, is not a nation baring its bowels.

HOSKINS (*to CARMODY*). You show evidence of lines drawn, I feel bound, from a long line of delineators, a genealogy equipped to show the points where your manly men turned to state. Here shall we conceive a new line of freedom, here shall we gladly gladiate. What latitude had you in mind for this longitudinal potency? Would you have stiffened your capon at Washington? Would you have given up New York and flung the Liberty Bell over the southern gentry in Philadelphia to peal forth their suffocation there?

ADRIANUS (*to HOSKINS*). The fly is cast, making the ripple academic. Whatever sacrifice Mister Carmody may have poised over Fort Winter, he must now certainly withdraw in favor of another balance, equally dubious—a state of war.

HOSKINS (*to CARMODY*). Do you propose it?

CARMODY. I cannot see why we are otherwise summoned, if not to gild the gravity of the President's forced decision.

ABE. No counsel's required, Mister Carmody, to glisten the forehead's weight, nor will a frown of thorns accept much more

shimmer than its own. I have made no decision, gentlemen. History lightly comes to each event, no doubt on the backs of men. I am not disposed to the burden; the crack of a civil war does not spur me—

FIRTH (*interrupting*). A word, Mister President?

ABE. Of course, Mister Firth.

FIRTH. Will the event take place?

ABE. Yes, Civil War will take place.

CARMODY (*to HOSKINS, triumphantly*). Well, sir, as you see, the inexorable is never wasted!

ABE (*to CARMODY*). It is always wasted on men who have ceased to be themselves; inevitability merits its name only when men, recognizing it, wrestle it. (*to FIRTH*) The Civil War will be fought—

MOULTON (*beginning to rise, interrupting*). I move we adjourn. Colors must be called, militias—

ABE (*sharply calling him to order*). Sit down, sir!

MOULTON (*baffled; sinking back in his chair*). Must fighting men wait on the conclusion of this humor?

ABE. Most fighting men are not fighting men since wars have become contaminated with ideas!

HOSKINS. Are you insufficiently contaminated, Mister President?

ADRIANUS (*to HOSKINS*). The President selected you for his Cabinet on the ground that you were opposed to a war between the states!

HOSKINS (*to ADRIANUS*). Men walk the ground, Mister Black, till they are buried in it. Only death is a fixed position.

ADRIANUS (*snapping*). Fixed bayonets characterise certain men who can remain rooted to courage in a defensive spot as much as run with it—

ABE (*interrupting*). Nobody doubts that we shall defend or offend bravely. What I despise here is that we display our heroism with such spirited ease. What I despise is this galloping gallantry—

HOSKINS. Mine does not gallop, Mister President. Black men have been hanged in the south—

ABE. And put to the torch.

HOSKINS. Sir, I simply do not suggest that my own shadow, now seen in the North by the height of those flames, grow shorter in

accommodation, but rather seek to lengthen its manliness by extinguishing the southern blaze—

ABE. Again I say I do not quarrel—I cannot dispute—with the fact that we shall fight. I only quarrel—and I do dispute—with the willing disposition of ourselves to what will be. Which one of you here will advise me against the declaration of war? (*turning to HARMING*) You have said nothing.

HARMING (*smiling*). I shall continue, Mister President.

ABE. Why?

HARMING. Anyone who expresses himself here, Mister President, whether it be for or against war or, having decided for one or the other questions the readiness thereto or seeks methods to delay the decision's execution—such a one betrays you altogether by having attached importance to any of these. Men live, men die, sooner or later—and make much of the variations they say constitute men and history; and some day, sir, men will neither live nor die, and inevitability itself vanish with him, for it is simply his lack of total control that made the word itself. I will permit myself only the observation, Mister President, that what you are now doing is crying out against your lack of total control.

(*There is absolute silence.*)

ABE (*at last*). I think you may leave, Mister Harming.

(*HARMING rises, barely inclines his head, and EXITS.*)

MOULTON (*gazing after HARMING*). A corrupt man.

ABE. I think not.

MOULTON (*to ABE, in astonishment*). Eh?

FIRTH (*to ABE*). Facts and figures, sir, figures and facts. The effort's to be made, and on effort must ride tax. War must be financed. We need levies and imposts. Private banking institutions must share in the—

ABE (*interrupting, shouting in the direction of OS*). I have not declared war!

(*The men of his Cabinet stare at each other in amazement, except CARMODY, who remains aloof, with his eyes on ABE. ENTER an ALDE, who crosses to ADRIANUS and speaks to him in low tones and then EXITS.*)

ADRIANUS. Mister President, we have just received by courier

the melancholy information that Fort Winter has fallen. I do not see how we can go on here maintaining a paradise of moral reserve—

HOSKINS (*cutting in*). —The Union will not stand as a figment of someone's moral reserve, and Paradise will not exist if Hell is not brought into line! Let the South secede, and we will have no morality and immorality, without either of which no state can exist.

CARMODY. I would support, Mister President, your refusal to declare a state of war.

MOULTON (*to CARMODY*). As your throat would utter its refusal at combat, it would be cut.

CARMODY. I demand you defend me, Mister President!

ABE. Advisors cannot be defended—

CARMODY. Yes, I understand the impossibility. You are a strangely halting man, sir. I would not have requested defense if you had refused to relieve and replenish Fort Winter: that would have composed a solid position against war. But you took the penultimate step towards the preservation of the Union—making the ultimate step inevitable. You comprehended inevitability, and worked within it—and now, with the final action already taking place *de facto*, you hesitate with a *de jure* recognition. The hesitation, sir, is in reality meaningless—but if you want that meaninglessness supported, then I need your defense as buttress. If you could prevent the dissolution of the Union without the living sons of these United States spurting their blood to coagulate and mend the rip, you would thus move. But you cannot. There is nothing to call upon but history. If you want peace, you must content yourself with half the country—

ABE. But half the country does not want half the country! Nor does the whole country want half of itself. Indeed, each half wants the other as it would be itself. Neither north nor south would be severed, sir. Such severance will be tolerated only to let the course of blood pulse through to run toward that basin which shall be powerful enough to enclose it, and then all severance shall cease—

ADRIANUS. You speak for the entire nation, Mister President—

ABE (*in complete anguish*). Yes—for the entire nation—

ADRIANUS. You do not wish to.

(ABE *crosses in an almost drunken manner toward the EXIT and shouts in the direction of OS.*)

ABE (*shouting*). No, I do not wish to, Mister Harming—I do not wish to! At the least I wish the presence of my specific unimportance—my special antagonist—

(*He stands, almost in a transfixed manner, in the far corner of the stage. The men of his Cabinet are totally silent. There is a long pause.*)

CARMODY (*very quietly, at last*). What do you want, Mister President?

ABE (*without looking at him*). None of you want to know what I want.

(*ABE starts to EXIT, then halts and half turns toward them.*)

ABE (*almost mumbling, indifferently*). I very nearly forgot, gentlemen. I declare war.

(*ABE EXITS.*)

SCENE 32

(*Night. The intermittent thunder of artillery. Through which can be heard fragments of a mouthorgan tune played by a soldier, "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mixed fresh and weary troops about in various postures. Some eat, some rest, some clean rifles and small field pieces, some smoke. It is very cold, and they try to wrap themselves warmly as possible, or stomp their feet, and flail their arms.*)

(*ENTER ABE with TOM KNIGHT, now a colonel in the Medical Corps. They are generally ignored. ABE lets his eye rove over the troops.*)

ABE. So many sons, eh?

TOM. One of them should be receiving dispatches in the Capitol.

ABE. Like those whose roots broke off and go about with hidden amputations, I can be anywhere, Tom. I had no advice on sonship. Besides, there is a carousel in steel here, in which the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is popular. Such tough childhood commends itself.

TOM. What will you find?

ABE. The sexless parent of my future, perhaps. Do they not hate me?

TOM. Hate you? Ask them.

ABE. I will. (*But he makes no move toward any of the soldiers.*)

TOM. How is Agatha?

ABE. A mother.

TOM. The children?

ABE. Mothered.

TOM. Fathered?

ABE. Fathers occur quickly; mothers for a lifetime.

TOM. From shoulders the more bowed, wit has the more archery. Tell me: among the Houses of Congress assembled, the petitioning widows and orphans, the medals bestowed and the commands shifted, the signing of bills and the chiefing of the war—do you remember Ann?

ABE. I let the dead think of the living! They have more time. Why do you bring up Ann?

TOM. Because of so many young men here.

ABE. Because of them, do you think she'll have a resurrection?

TOM. I thought she might make you think more lovingly on them.

ABE. Not when they hate me.

TOM. Do they?

ABE. Do they know that the battle tomorrow may be decisive? but that the muffled drums beaten upon after may be drawn from their own hollowed skins? If they know this, why should they not abominate me?

TOM. Ask them!

(There is a pause, and then ABE goes over to one of the soldiers.

TOM goes with him.)

ABE *(to FIRST SOLDIER)*. I would wish you fires.

FIRST SOLDIER. As the Confederates would, who plot more warmth. I'll take cold ignorance. Who are you, sir?

ABE. An observer from Washington.

FS. You bear some mimicry in your person to President Gray. Your height nearly disappears.

ABE. I have been told.

FS. You know him?

ABE. Only from official receptions; he shook my hand, but grasped nothing more. I am informed your campaign will clear away a climax tomorrow, but that many men will mount to a dumb cry before it is done. Do you know this?

FS. I know this.

ABE. Do you believe that such battle must be done?

FS. Were you in any battles once?

ABE. The Black Hawk War.

FS. Did you believe your offensive had to be done?

ABE. Yes. Will you do it tomorrow?

FS. Yes. But not out of courage. Only because there is nothing else to do.

ABE. You could run. There are many exits in the night.

FS. I'm bright with fear. I would be the first to call the alarm to myself.

ABE. I say you could run. You could believe in running if not in fighting.

FS. Do you advise me to desert?

ABE. Only to do what you believe.

FS. Mostly, we do not know what we believe, sir. Therefore, we love. In loving, we forget either the necessity to believe or the pressure to doubt.

ABE. Whom do you love?

FS. Why, Abe Gray.

ABE. But he commits many of you to the earth.

FS. Do you hate him yourself that you would have me do so as well? Is your hate that much that you would seek to share it?

ABE. No, no—

FS. Well—

ABE. Why do you love him?

FS. I have never seen a man so dependent on so many common men. I have never heard a man as he acquaint all the common men with his dependence on them, and tell them as well he has neither the right to so depend nor the belief in such dependence. I have never seen a man throw himself so much upon the mercy of all the common doubts. Well, sir, he says each single state of the Union depends for its life upon the common doubts of all the thirty-six states together, and must throw itself on the mercy of them all together. And if the Union cannot be preserved, then the separate states shall have no mercy upon which to cast themselves. If he can thus act with men, we must act thus with the preservation of the

Union. He has made this clear. I love the man who can make this clear. And so I have no need for courage, which quality is a deception, but only need fear large enough that I will die so that I may defeat men of lesser fears.

ABE. Is there no man here who hates him?

FS. I do not think so. But I am arrogant enough to speak only for myself.

(ABE motions to TOM.)

ABE (to TOM). Come. (to FS) Good night, and may some god be with you.

FS. Thank you, and goodnight.

(ABE walks over with TOM to another soldier, who is quite young.)

ABE (to SECOND SOLDIER). You, sir. Good evening.

SECOND SOLDIER (*churlishly*). What do you want?

TOM (*interposing*). Be civil, if you will, soldier—

SS. Sir, you wear my superiority. But in uniform I feel little civility.

TOM. This man is an observer with the Union forces.

SS. Observe, then.

TOM (to ABE). I think we should go elsewhere. He needs discipline tonight.

ABE. He will have enough of it in the morning.

(ABE turns to SS.)

ABE. How old are you?

SS. A son aged two, a wife twenty-two, and my mother and father can go to hell.

ABE. You may be there to recommend it with great warmth. They say sons often precede their parents to the places the former condemn the latter.

(The SOLDIER laughs in spite of himself.)

SS. You've undoubtedly cast away more pits than I shall ever look at. Again, what do you want?

ABE. Truth.

SS. What a bore. People who don't know what specific lie they want always end up by asking for a generalized lie called truth. Let me alone to unprepare myself: I will have more of a chance to live.

ABE. Will you fight with all your strength tomorrow?

SS. With as little as possible, for a responding docility from the enemy. I love my wife and son. I would beget more. I may even dodge tomorrow's engagement altogether. I may request President Gray as a substitute.

ABE. Do you think him cowardly?

SS. I say this, that any man who does not flag his sight from a rifle's butt is a coward. Listen, Observer, could I not administrate in Washington? Could I not grieve better over falling men there rather than here? Would I not have more time to dispatch telegrams to survivors from the capitol than from here?

ABE. The mortality-rate of kings, presidents, prime-ministers and powerful men is as much in the unbalance as the nameless knave and unbeheaded commoner.

SS. But silkily unbalanced, sir. For the power men, death comes deferentially, with the best of spirits in hand, even with a woman's thigh perhaps, an old comfortable dog of a fire in the grate, an imprintable bed for the declining gut, perhaps a method of music from paid-up players, an unhurried priest in tow with fine elegant Latin beckoning, and often as not such an impossibly lovely view from an open window that the man dying waves it away—away! as a sparkling illusion that oppresses him too much and that he must quickly quit or else go mad! While we tattered, pocketless diers do not find in death such convenience, such a servile array to bear us out from soft consciousness to a softer oblivion. We are plucked with a twinkling twang, a spitted thud, our hearts chunked out and heaved like hopeless weights to smash against the splintered walls of our ribs, where for a few last pulses it would clutch, but, slipping on its own blood, must let go and slide like pulpy stupid firemen down the greased pole of the spine at whose bottom the heart will dumbly stare, toward some swiftly reclining blaze as the brain ever more distantly clangs and clangs and clangs! We die unbearably, sir; awkwardly, in patched parts, hungrily and angrily and with such childish prattle that even the most deafened mother could not bear. We die out of spite, cursing love, begging for somebody's fingernail. We die appallingly, in amplitudinous multiplicity, in such number that the oceans of the world would strain their

bombastic tides to provide us sufficient lamentation. We die in strict ice and licentious stench. We die bugged, crawled, infested, beffied and besmeared. Have you seen the battles, man? Have you seen North and South zealously polish the Whiteness of a hundred thousand skulls that rear their grinning offices over a few free black men?

TOM. It is for the Republic, soldier—

SS. Then goddamn the Republic! Goddamn the thirty-eight states!

ABE. You hate him, then?

SS. Who?

ABE. Abe Gray.

SS. Hate him? Yes. Impetuously, longingly, quietly, loudly, chokingly, sweetly, grossly and in the net.

ABE. And if you had him here before you?

SS. I think I would thread his eyes with my bayonet—

TOM (*calling*). Guard— (*to SS*) There's court-martial in—

ABE (*interrupting, to TOM*). Call off your guard!

TOM. I shall not—

SS (*to ABE*). Let him call—

ABE. No.

(A GUARD ENTERS, *running*.)

GUARD (*to TOM*). You wanted me, sir?

ABE (*to GUARD*). He did not.

GUARD (*to ABE*). I'm not under your orders, sir—

ABE (*to TOM*). Tell him.

(TOM *is silent*.)

ABE (*roaring*). Tell him!

TOM (*to GUARD*). I was in error. You may resume your post.

(The GUARD salutes, TOM returns it, the GUARD EXITS.)

SS (*to ABE*). You've considerable power for an observer. Who are you?

ABE. Observers are often powerful.

SS. Who are you?

(There is a moment's pause.)

ABE (*to TOM, quietly*). I think I have found him.

TOM. You want to, so soon?

ABE. Yes.

TOM. I don't believe you.

ABE. Watch carefully, then. And I want no intercession—

TOM. That is impossible to ask of me.

ABE. I ask it.

SS. What do you ask? Whom have you found?

ABE. The man who hates me. I am Abe Gray.

SS (*with a long sigh*). Ah.

(*And the SECOND SOLDIER starts to cry.*)

ABE (*shaking his head*). You must not cry. You have said you hated me. You must not cry.

(*The SECOND SOLDIER extends both his arms, clutches ABE by the shoulders as he cries more and more like a child. ABE stands stiffly as the SECOND SOLDIER loosens his grip and, sobbing remorselessly, falls to his knees before ABE. The tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is now almost unheard but still unmistakable. ABE shakes his head in a quiet despair, in an indescribable disappointment and weariness.*)

ABE (*to TOM*). He does not hate me. He is simply very young, and very tired, and very much in love with what he loves.

TOM. It is not time.

ABE. It is not time. (*to the SECOND SOLDIER*) You must get up, and go to sleep, which is all I know. I cannot tell you if you will live or die after the morning ends. I hope you will live, as I hope all things that can live will do so, even the Republic, which lives on what we grant it. And if you find within yourself something you cannot spare, and grant it to the Union, that is all that it may take, the spared unsparing, which is that toughness by which a nation endures. You can give no more than that, if you will give it, which I do not and will command, because we here thrive on what each of us commands of ourselves, and I will not take that away from anyone, not from one man, because if I take it away then the country has one less of its number, and weakens. You must get up, sir—

(*The SECOND SOLDIER looks up at ABE, his crying diminishes and stops, and he rises.*)

ABE (*continuing*). Thank you. I wanted you to get up, so that you could go to sleep. You need sleep, son, either for quitting us or

keeping us.

(All the soldiers have stirred now, and look toward ABE, who makes a grave semi-circle in their midst.)

ABE. Goodnight to you all, goodnight, goodnight. I will take your messages with me. Again, goodnight.

(TOM and ABE EXIT.)

SCENE 33

(A mob of white men and women, shouting, cursing, milling around, hurling epithets and garbage at an effigy of ABE GRAY some of them carry. It is night, and the scene is lit with careening torches borne aloft by some of the mob. Dogs bark and howl. Rifles and pistols are shot, with the effigy as target. Many drink from bottles of whisky and hurl the empties at the effigy. Bullets and empty bottles intermittently go wild, and someone in the mob is hurt and killed. There are screams and lamentations. Men's clothing are torn off, and women shriek, their dresses ripped, their bodies half naked.)

THE MOB. —Haul me up so I can spit at his navel—

—He's got his goddamn Union again, now let him carry the South like a load of crap—

—Pull down his pants so we can get a bull's eye—

—You wont find nothin there but a limp Christ on a bubblin cross—

—You're wastin good bourbon on the sonofabitch—

—The whole North'll pay for more—

—Anybody got a loose nigger aroun we can paste up there against his mouth—

—He and his wife and four kids screw niggers every night so they can get used to them—

—Sure, an first they take on a roomful of Jews to get the taste—

—I'm starvin, I'm down to my last nigger—

—Abe Gray'd feed you to him first—

—I'll kill the next bastard that calls out his name—

—He murdered all the five of my sons—

—At Missionary Ridge—

—At Nashville—

—Petersburg and Antietam and Gettysburg—

—The skinniest Judas that ever was born—

—Assassin of a new nation—

—We wanted to get out peaceful—

—We jus wanted to belong to ourselves—

—Wanted—

—Wanted—

—Like to kill him with stickin niggers in him like a pin-cushion—

(The effigy is hurled to the ground. The MOB rips it apart, stomps on it, tosses the pieces this way and that.)

THE MOB. —Brain him—

—Use his guts for an armature—

—Make him a toilet—

—He made us lose—

—Lose—

—Lose—

—We're gonna go hungry—

—Cold—

—He made us scared—

—Scared—

—He made us kiss his ass—

—His feet—

—Made us smell his farts—

—Bled us—

—Churn in his bowels—

—Stretch his tongue on a rack—

—Losers—

—Despoiled—

—Raped—

—Took away our slaves—

—Ah—

—Ah—

—The best preserves we ever put up for our winters was the black jelly of our slaves—

—Whip him—

(Many in the MOB take out whips and slash this way and that)

indiscriminately so that many others fall yelling and writhing—)

THE MOB. —I'm not Abe—don't whip me—

—Whip him—

—He's that piece of cardboard—

—That painted eye—

—Not me—

—The crayon mouth—

—Whip him—

—Snap out his ribs like a spring-knife—

(Blindly, the MOB seizes on a MAN. They slap him, punch him, he falls to the ground. They kick him, stomp on him and then whip him. All of the MOB yells to get closer to him, for each to throw a blow or lash with a whip. Some finally take out their pistols and begin to shoot at the MAN on the ground.)

THE MAN ON THE GROUND. I'm not Abe—I'm not Abe—I'm not Abe—

FROM THE MOB. —Said I'd kill the bastard that calls out his name—

—Now—

—Now—

THE MAN ON THE GROUND. Abe Gray's up North—he's North—North—can't you see he's up—

(A volley of shots closes his mouth. He twitches, and lies still. The MOB is suddenly absolutely silent, and transfixed. Then, suddenly, one man breaks away and EXITS. Then two. Then groups, furtively and swiftly. Only the MAN ON THE GROUND is left, alone. The silence and stillness are overwhelming. Then, suddenly, the MAN ON THE GROUND springs to his feet, silent, and walks firmly to CENTER PROSCENIUM, facing the audience, staring for a full moment. Then he opens his mouth as wide as he can and starts to laugh soundlessly. His neck doubles in laughter, then his shoulders, and at last his entire body is doubled in laughter, still soundless, as: (BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 34

(Weeping and laughing and shouting exultantly, a CROWD OF NEGROES hurls itself at ABE GRAY as he ENTERS with AIDES who

sweat to keep his path clear but find it for the moment impossible, for waves of Negroes keep ENTERING and throwing themselves at ABE, kneeling at his feet and clutching at his body. They nearly shout the spiritual, "Comin For To Carry Me Home," and chant ABE's name as if at some celestial rally. They try to kiss him and embrace him, and ABE himself must fight to keep them from dragging him down.)

THE CROWD. Glory to the man—

—Glory—

—Jesus Christ, the Second—

—Christ the First—

—Glory—

—Gongs of glory to Abe Gray—

—He shines with the sweat of God—

—His shoulders are the altars for majesty—

—His nerves in streamers explode over us all from the scarlet celebration of his heart of freedom—

—Amen—

—Amen—

—Triple-throated glory—

—He wrench us from the bondage—

—He done hauled us free—

—Selah—

—His mouth is everywhere in the land—

—His beauty runneth over—

—He save us from the hanging—

—He delivereth us from the whip—

—Glory unto Gray—

—Glory, glory—

ABE (*shouting*). There is a cottonfield and a lonesome train, my brethren—

THE CROWD. —Press out all his pain as the wine from the grapes—

—Let us drink for him any vinegar that comes to his lips—

—We are the shrine that buildeth about him—

—Hail to the Lamb of the Lord—

—The Lamb with the brazen hoof that hath stupefied the brains

of our oppressors—

ABE (*shouting*). You will yet mourn me and curse me—

THE CROWD. —See how troubled is our man—

—Abe Gray here is only love—

—Believe in us, Abe Gray, for we are your believers—

—If you are hungry, we shall give you eat—

—If you are sad, we shall play you jubilant songs—

—If you are blind, we shall see for you—

—If thou shalt be helpless, we shall be thy strength—

—If thou liest down, we shall raise thee up—

—If thou weepest, we shall dry thy tears—

—If thou canst not hear, we shall deafen the ears of God for the passageway of sound—

—If thou diest, we shall weigh down thy wings with our own souls to carry to the Lord till thou fallest into the bosom of eternity—

ABE (*shouting above the cries*). Freedom is an iron lung, my brethren. Freedom is true and clear but breathes its truth and clarity in iron. I believe a man can act as he wills, but he will draw blood as he scrapes the teeth of his will against all the counter-freedoms that surround him! Remember the counter-freedoms, my brethren—remember the fierce loggerheads of all men's freedoms. Never forget that you have obtained iron—iron—iron!

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 35

(*A rostrum in an amphitheatre. The scene opens as applause dies down, quickly. The men who make up the amphitheatre's audience, who have been standing, sit down. We see rows and rows of empty seats. Abe Gray stands on the rostrum. Behind him, on a higher level, is the SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, who is also standing.*)

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE. Gentlemen, the President.

(*The SPEAKER sits.*)

ABE. Members of the Congress assembled. I come to report that the Union once again is one.

(*He pauses, and looks about him at the empty seats here and there in the amphitheatre.*)

ABE. Fill up your empty seats, gentlemen; fill them up, yes.

(He chuckles.)

ABE. An odd thing has happened. Some of you may remember my First Inaugural, if it is your custom to crave things through the descriptions of other men. Well, I had wanted at that time to speak as the representative of all the men of this country, of all the things of these men, and of the boundaries that held the things and the men. I had wanted to utter nothing short of the United States. But I succeeded in voicing nobody but myself. This morning I had wanted to voice only myself, to tell you that I wanted no vengeance to be visited upon the vanquished. But now I discover that I am all the states of this Republic, and they are speechless.

(He leaves the rostrum.)

ABE *(as he goes; casually, almost absent-mindedly)*. Fill them up, gentlemen. Yes. Here—*(he points)*—and there. Fill up your empty seats.

(ABE EXITS.)

SCENE 36

(Night. AGATHA alone before a slow fire burning in a grate. She shivers slightly, and draws her shawl more closely about her. ABE ENTERS. He is dressed for a formal occasion, and he is puzzled that she is not.)

ABE. The fire's low.

AGATHA. Provoke it.

ABE. I'll bank it.

AGATHA. Do.

ABE. We should be ready to leave for the theatre.

AGATHA. It would be unseemly to go. I shall not.

ABE. Unseemly, Agatha? The war is done.

AGATHA. But men are not, nor their grief. Where's yours?

ABE. The nation cannot afford mine.

AGATHA. I cannot afford grieving for you, nor can the children. I do not hate you so much as to cast myself a father, a spiteful role for a woman. I must love you now and then.

ABE. Why do you think of grieving me?

AGATHA. Because of your dream last week, in which you saw yourself in a catafalque, and people mourning you.

ABE. I had forgotten it.

AGATHA. A woman will remember her husband's dreams, that they are so much of the last vulnerable in a man when all else is defended by daylight that she will spend the night guarding them.

ABE. All dreams are nothing more than desires for one kind of immortality or another. Do you worry about my immortality, Agatha?

AGATHA. You are yourself too assured of it! and could therefore welcome it with equal ease. I am not so luxuriously persuaded to my quick death. It seems to me, Abe, that disdaining the furs of the flesh has led you into a boudoir of the spirit.

ABE (*smiling*). We shall be late for the play.

AGATHA. Your smile is a frozen landscape. You and I once were a frontier of a man and a woman. We came from the prairies of our youth to the protocols and procedures of the governing. Now we are documented and archived and highly identified anonymities. The guns sound for us, the soldiers salute—

ABE (*sharply, interrupting*). We shall be late for the play—

AGATHA. And perhaps much too late for your dream. If we do not go, it may be altogether impossible.

ABE. Dreams are always possible—

AGATHA. We do not have to attend them!

ABE. We shall be present in a theatre, not a skull.

AGATHA. I should not want you to undergo the necessity of distinguishing between the two.

ABE. Will you come now or no?

(AGATHA *RISES slowly, and comes face to face with ABE.*)

AGATHA. No.

(ABE *turns to go. She places a hand on his arm. Reluctantly, he halts.*)

AGATHA. I don't understand why you should want to go.

ABE. For a few hours—to be a spectator at a tragedy, and nothing more. The play is my favorite: *Lear*, and the actor one of the greatest of our time—Gordon Bone. You may stay here, if you wish, but I must hurry. Put off your hand.

AGATHA. "Put off your hand."

ABE. Well.

AGATHA. I wish I could make some divine meaning from your "put off your hand," as: put off your foot, put off your eyes, put off your everything. Are you divine? See? I have put off my hand.

(She stands away from him, but he does not go.)

ABE *(in very low tones)*. I am not divine.

AGATHA. Then I beg you not to go, for I have put off my everything, and you have put off your divinity. You are ill-clad, as your Lear, and you should not go. What is there that is so transcendently touching about a man who may no longer be touched? If I were a power, I should kick the transcendental into the cellar, and neither you nor I should be here, nor the Presidency, nor affairs of state, nor thunderous debates, nor the masses upon the masses of the multitudes, nor—oh my God, I am defeated by my very being! I am afraid, Abe, I am afraid! Your heart juts out like your nose—you are an ungainly beauty—

(She comes up to him, and touches him with her fingers, lightly.)

AGATHA *(continuing)*. —all of you as if the dark were stamped out of the light, with your muscles become scarecrows, each of your cells little by little become illiterate each to the other and reading one another by a dimming lamp—"who is there?" crying from one part of the body to another—

ABE *(interrupting, sharply)*. Agatha—

AGATHA. Do not interrupt my inventory—I shall have to close down—

(She slumps into the chair, trying to regain control.)

AGATHA *(continuing)*. I shall have to close down—I am a ravening wolf upon sorrow, far ahead of the pack—

(She shakes her head, abruptly breaking off.)

AGATHA *(continuing)*. Do not go. I am afraid I shall not see you alive again. Do not go!

ABE. I have lost fear.

AGATHA. Then I have lost you. Ah, be craven, stink with cowardice—I shall not abhor you. Tremble and I shall be grateful. Whine and whimper in terror, and I shall gather you up. Stay.

ABE. There is no rational explanation as to why I should stay.

AGATHA. Reason murders, logic leads to slaughter. Defy all

plans, change plans from hour to hour, alter plans minute to minute, juggle plans from second to second—never know where you go from one tick to the next tock. Surprise yourself, turn on yourself, retreat and advance and go sideways in the space of a breath and you may not meet your enemy, who is your logic, your brilliance, your profundity, your fanatical future. Unanalyse, undissect—never think where you are so that you may go anywhere the next instant—this may keep you, and keep you with me in the oddest chance, as much a chance as for you to attend the theatre, whereas now I have no chance, Abe—I am unchanced, outchanced, subchanced—

ABE. This is madness' privilege, not that of the head of the state—

AGATHA. I don't want the head of the state, it does me no good—I want that gauche god's whole body, the awkward angel—Abe—

ABE. I am scheduled to be in my box, not implored by some stupefying superstition.

AGATHA (*exhausted*). Yes, yes—

ABE. I shall return, not too ebb in the evening.

AGATHA (*mechanically*). Yes, yes—

(*He turns to go, and is close to the EXIT when she calls after him.*)

AGATHA. Abe.

(*He turns.*)

ABE. Yes.

(*She slowly rises from her chair and crosses to him, puts her hands on his head and draws it down and kisses him.*)

AGATHA (*staring at him rendingly*). Your mouth is rough. The world is chapped tonight.

ABE. That may be.

(*He removes her arms from him, and they hang stiffly at her sides. She is rigid. He looks at her with surpassing compassion for a moment, then abruptly turns and EXITS. Then she shakes her head unbelievably and cries out toward OS.*)

AGATHA. You must tell me what I shall say were your last words to your wife—there is something one must say about last

words—I have been brought up properly, educated to listen carefully for my husband's last words—for the husband always has precedence, in all things, in life and in death he goes first—Abe—Abe—

(But there is no reply. Now she seems puzzled and detached. And she turns to cross back to her chair, where she slowly sits, puzzling.)

AGATHA (*musings*). Because someone will ask me, and all I shall be able to say will be, "Goodnight, Agatha," he said. But he didn't, did he? He didn't say goodnight. He must have forgotten, surely. I shall have to say that he said, "That may be." But that's meaningless, inconclusive—

(She looks out toward the audience.)

AGATHA (*wonderingly*). What shall I do? Whatever shall I do?

(The lights DIM OUT.)

SCENE 37

(In the overwhelmingly bright glare of a backstage dressing-room, GORDON BONE, seated before a mirror, is removing his King Lear makeup with tremendous torpor, as though each movement is agonizing. CHRISTINE ENTERS, screaming:)

CHRISTINE. Liar! Liar! Liar!

BONE. Christine—

CHRISTINE. I watched from the wings. You did nothing. You knew it would have been a fantasy for the President to hold back an audience if you had made or threatened to make an attempt on his life. You are fantasy, brother. You are a liar. You are the very nose-pickings of cowardice. You have let him live—live—

(She crosses to the dressing-table and in a fury sweeps the jars of grease-paint onto the floor, where they crash into a hundred pieces—)

CHRISTINE. Coward, liar, fantasy—

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 38

(A dimly-lit corridor. ABE, ADRIANUS BLACK, TOM KNIGHT.)

ADRIANUS. Unprecedented, Mister President—

ABE. I intend to congratulate the man.

TOM. Agatha is probably waiting up for you.

ABE. I doubt it.

ADRIANUS. Well, then, sir, let us come with you.

ABE. Unnecessary.

TOM. We will wait for you in the lobby.

ABE. I pray you do not. My secret-service men are stationed throughout the theatre and on the streets in the vicinity.

TOM. You have no conception of what kind of man this Gordon Bone is—

ABE. He is, very simply, a very great actor, and I wish to tell him so.

ADRIANUS (*shrugging*). Goodnight, Mister President.

(ABE *inclines his head*. TOM *looks at him a moment, then EXITS with ADRIANUS*. ABE *EXITS in the opposite direction*.)

SCENE 39

(*The backstage dressing-room. BONE and CHRISTINE. CHRISTINE is weeping softly while BONE has just finished picking up the broken pieces of glass and putting them on the table. There is a sharp rapping on the door.*)

BONE. Yes?

ABE'S VOICE OS. I should like a word with you. May I come in?

BONE. Who is it? I'm terribly tired.

ABE'S VOICE OS (*after a moment's pause*). Abe Gray.

(BONE *starts violently*. CHRISTINE *lifts her head, no longer weeping. She stares at BONE.*)

CHRISTINE (*softly*). May I again watch from the wings?

ABE'S VOICE OS. I have not heard you.

BONE (*to CHRISTINE*). Yes.

(CHRISTINE *EXITS from another door*.)

BONE (*calling through the door*). Come in, Mister President, please.

(ABE GRAY *ENTERS*.)

BONE (*as he starts to rise*). I am surely honored—

(ABE *motions him to keep his seat*.)

ABE (*interrupting*). No need.

BONE. You indeed isolate the honor and thereby exalt it: there is no one with you.

ABE. No one. I am quite full.

BONE. Ah.

ABE. I have never seen *Lear* done with the soul so much in solitary confinement.

BONE. I let my own soul out to put in it those most powerful of chains, forged by blankness.

ABE. Yes. Would you care to be our guest when your run is completed?

BONE. I? Your guest?

ABE. Possibly you are unprepared to be anyone's guest. There are such, and I would understand. Do you decline?

BONE. In a sense, Mister President.

ABE. You are a happy man in having selected but one.

BONE. But the object may be less so.

ABE. We are always committed to the object; the object never to us. Will you be our guest, Mister Bone?

BONE. I do not believe you are aware that I am a southerner.

ABE (*with a faint smile*). On that count I would not discriminate against you.

(BONE rises and switches off the main lights of the dressing-room, leaving only the lights around his mirror, in front of which he again sits. All that can be seen of the two men are their heads and shoulders.)

ABE. Why do you depress the lights?

BONE. Less contrast with the dark.

ABE. Had you a memory in mind?

BONE. We always have memory in mind. Sometimes, it precedes us.

ABE. I must tell you that I batten on this exchange. I rarely encounter so precise an opposition.

BONE. I do not think I oppose you.

ABE. Ah, quite precise: even in your denial of antipodes. I could spend much time with you, at the expense of the state.

BONE. I will not cost the whole state much.

ABE. Then you will come to the White House.

BONE. Well. . . .

(Before ABE can press him, he hears the extremely distant sound of a train whistle, and he listens. Only ABE can hear it. BONE does not.)

BONE. What is it, Mister President?

ABE. I had not thought there was a train-depot nearby.

BONE. I have not heard of any.

(ABE momentarily grips the sides of the chair he sits in.)

ABE. You are certain.

BONE. Yes.

ABE *(in very low tones)*. I see.

(ABE rises.)

ABE. I think I must go, Mister Bone.

BONE. Oh? May I shake your hand?

ABE. Of course.

(ABE crosses to BONE and extends his hand. BONE takes it. ABE notices the broken glass on the table.)

ABE. An accident?

BONE. My sister was here, Mister President, and was angry with me.

ABE. Surely not because of your performance.

BONE. No. Because I had failed to kill you from the stage, as I had planned.

(ABE stands quite still, with his hand still in BONE's grasp. BONE suddenly wrenches his hand away.)

BONE. I am not your glove, Mister President!

(BONE pulls out a drawer from the table. We cannot see this: it is completely in shadow. We simply hear the sound. We have not even seen the shaking of the hands. BONE grasps a revolver, which he points at ABE; but this too we cannot see; we can only infer it from the motion of ABE's head, that he takes a step back, and from the ensuing dialogue.)

BONE. The weapon advises you to stay.

ABE. The advice we receive is sometimes altogether inhuman.

BONE. That's kind of you.

ABE. You will miss the pleasure of guilt.

BONE. No. I will find my humanity by supporting the inhumanity of this revolver.

ABE. But once beyond this door, humanity itself will deter you from escape.

BONE. Do you argue for your life, Mister President?

ABE. Should I not?

BONE. It might anger me to finish argument.

ABE. Do you not wish to escape?

BONE. I am not sure.

ABE. Escape is so much simpler when no crime is committed.

BONE. But we cannot conceive of escape unless a crime is committed.

ABE. That would depend on whether you would think my assassination is a crime or no.

BONE. I would not think it a crime.

ABE. What, then, is the purpose of committing a murder if it is not a crime?

BONE. I see you are diabolic.

ABE. You make me out a symbol, sir! I have made myself one, indeed, if I asked the purpose of committing a murder if it is not a crime. You must unmake me, sir! For it is no crime to kill a symbol. It is only a crime to kill a man. I beg you, if you kill, that you kill a man—

BONE. The man is unimportant—

ABE. No! Then you could murder anyone who incarnates all you oppose—

BONE. You are the chief incarnation.

ABE. Indeed?

BONE. Yes.

ABE. If I am chief, then I am special, and no longer symbolic.

BONE. That would mean I could not murder you at all—if you ceased to be a symbol, Mister President. The fact that you would die as a man is a piece of trivia. I will not dispose of trivia. Will you step down from the Presidency of the United States?

ABE. I cannot. I am no king that can abdicate. Nor can I impeach myself—

BONE. Would you want the symbol itself to die?

ABE. Yes. And leave the man.

BONE. But that is quite impossible. Is it not?

ABE (*after a pause*). It seems so. But surely you must hate me.

BONE. I do not.

ABE. How can you not hate me?

BONE. I do not know you.

ABE. I defeated your Confederacy.

BONE. Does that do more than introduce you to me?

ABE. I issued the orders that moved the armies to dismember the South.

BONE. No. The North issued the orders through you. I do not know you.

ABE. You must.

BONE. You cannot compel me.

ABE. If I live long enough in your presence, you will know me.

BONE. I am in control of that. You plead, then, that you live long enough for me to know you so that you may die as an individual. Is that correct?

ABE. Yes.

BONE. That would mean you do not want to die at all, because then I should not have to assassinate you. Consequently, this means you plead most intensely for your life, and I am angered, I am heavy with fury—and could kill you with great ease long before you may attain to manliness without the symbol—

ABE. I pray you—

BONE. I warn you: do not pray me: men have gods; symbols have none.

ABE. Yes. Do you hope to reinvigorate the South by the act of murdering me?

BONE. Never.

(*For the second time the train whistle is heard by ABE. At no point does BONE hear it. Only—ABE and the audience. The sound is now less remote. ABE tenses. We can feel with him that each time the train whistle sounds he is closer to a boundary-line.*)

ABE. I think you said there was no train-depot nearby.

BONE. True.

ABE. Are there tracks? Does a train pass in the vicinity?

BONE. No.

ABE. Then I assume you heard no sound that could have been made by a train?

BONE. None. Have you?

(ABE looks at him a long time, pondering his reply.)

ABE. Yes.

BONE. Then you are quite mad. Are you not?

ABE. Perhaps.

BONE. And when the sound will seem directly upon you, as if someone pulled upon your own neck cords to produce the most intolerable kind of shriek in your brain, you believe you will die—that the sound of the bullet from my pistol will itself be obliterated by the avalanche of the whistle, which will signify to you that the men of the North and countless citizens over the contorted face of the world itself will have begun to mourn for you. Is this what you believe?

ABE. Yes! And take care—you begin to distinguish me—by my very madness—take care—

BONE. I must risk that.

ABE. Now? Now you risk that? Why?

BONE. In that I may not be able to kill a madman—it is as though I cannot kill a sanity beside itself with prayer—that madness is a very religion—that madness is sanity without belief, without hope—a thing on its knees—on its belly—

ABE. You anger me.

BONE. How is that?

ABE. I am not on my belly.

BONE. You are relinquishing an advantage—

ABE. You cannot see me on my belly. Do I now sound as if I am a man upon my belly?

BONE. I will not give you the advantage of my impression—

ABE. But how will you judge your own truth without testing reaction upon another? Do you exist alone?

BONE. No.

ABE. Well, then?

BONE. You are not craven.

ABE. Then you know not if I be mad or sane. You do not know

if I should live or die. You do not know if I should have lived or died unless you kill me or let me go. You are on your way to knowing absolutely nothing, is that not so?

BONE. You abstract and abstract and abstract, Mister President. More and more I see a man who is neither North nor South, neither man nor woman. You begin to ruin yourself utterly in your own desires. What are those desires? To what do you belong? Do you know? Are you so far from the context of what you have lived in that you cannot describe yourself?

ABE. I am Abe Gray.

BONE. Abe Gray what?

ABE. President of the United States of America—

BONE. From one symbol to another you proceed—

ABE (*wildly*). I cannot contend that I no longer hold an office—

BONE. Describe, describe—

ABE. I declared war to preserve the context of a continent—

(BONE *laughs loudly*.)

BONE. The context of a continent! Where is Abe Gray in the context of a continent? You are no longer a man, Mister President—accept it, accept it! Why can't you accept that?

ABE (*stuttering and laughing*). Surely you do not see a woman before you.

BONE. Surely I do not! But you must understand that it does not matter if I see a man or a woman. Do you want to die or no? If you do not, then there is no trainwhistle.

ABE. I heard nothing.

BONE. Craven! Man upon a belly!

(*The trainwhistle sounds a third time, closer. ABE sweats.*)

BONE. Are you warm?

ABE. No.

BONE. You may remove your jacket, if you wish. Your shirt, if you wish. You can be naked, if you wish.

ABE. No.

BONE. You heard a sound.

ABE. No. Listen, if you intend to murder me, you cannot have the advantage over me in the act of living—only in the act of death,

sir. I will not permit you triumph in the act of living—

BONE. Prevent me, then.

ABE. Do you want to be prevented?

BONE. How can I know if you make no attempt?

ABE. You are not Lear?

BONE. I am not.

ABE. Who are you?

BONE. An actor.

ABE. Always?

BONE. Yes.

ABE. Whom do you act now?

BONE. A dead nation.

ABE. Is that possible?

BONE. No. I am acting the impossible, for which you yourself have little courage. You have become a symbol, you are a public figure. You signify and stand for. But you do not have the final courage to die as that.

ABE. Can an abstraction be afraid?

BONE. No—no—

ABE. Then you are he to prove me man or symbol—

BONE. That is not my purpose—I wish to prove nothing of the sort—

ABE. Then you cannot even threaten to kill me. You cannot even entertain this within your mind—

BONE. Your logic has you slip away from me. I cannot countenance that—

ABE. No. To discountenance that, would you kill me?

BONE. Yes—

ABE. For god's sake, then, what is your purpose? You said you had no hope to reinvigorate the South by murder. What then would you hope to accomplish?

BONE (*very quietly*). You are warm, Mister President, and yet you will not take your coat off.

ABE. True.

BONE. You would not appear naked here, would you?

ABE. I would not.

BONE. For reasons of propriety.

ABE. Yes.

BONE. If another man might want to stay clothed, could there not be a reason other than propriety?

ABE (*slowly*). What other reason could there possibly be?

BONE (*after a long pause*). I hate you.

ABE (*after staring at him a moment*). I don't believe that. It tends to trivialize me. I will not believe you hate me. I will not believe—

(BONE turns away, and ABE breaks off his sentence.)

ABE (*in low tones*). For what reason could a man refuse to exhibit his nakedness other than propriety?

BONE. If I let you live, Mister President, would you not see to it that the South would recover, grow prosperous and have sinews as sails upon the future?

ABE. I would.

BONE. That would gratify you.

ABE. It would.

BONE. It would enable you at last to turn your back upon the war.

ABES And enable the South do so similarly.

BONE. There need not have been a war.

ABE. We could not exist half whip and half free.

BONE. By whose definition, sir? By whose values, sir? You spoke of a continent united. Was there a bolt from a unified heaven that illuminated the indivisibility of a continent? Were not we of the South equally free to conceive a nation of masters and slaves as you of the North to indulge your conception of an unmastered multitude?

ABE. You had your illuminations of split adjacencies as we had ours of none. That the two illuminations were too blinding upon both peoples led us to the War between the States. That war now is bled and done. Go home, sir.

BONE. That you shall rebuild.

ABE. Yes.

BONE. Yours is cold nobility. I will not have it. You rebuild us to close the memory within yourself. You dry up our blood so that you forget you slashed the wound. You are a traitor to your memory,

and traitors must be executed—

ABE. Who apes nobility now? Who now is the judge? Upon whose mouth does violent virtue now foam?

BONE. You could not tolerate a nation denuded, Mister President?

ABE. No.

BONE. You could not bear the South stripped and deprived and possessionless as it now is. Is that true, sir?

ABE. Altogether.

(The trainwhistle again sounds, closer, louder—and once again. The ensuing dialogue is punctuated by periodic blasts of a mournful trainwhistle, becoming more and more unbearable.)

BONE. You would not have it a veritable *Lear*—

ABE. I would not. But you must end this.

BONE. You wish to die?

ABE. No.

BONE. You lie.

ABE. No.

BONE. But you hear the whistle.

ABE. Yes—yes—you must stop it—you control it.

BONE. I do not. Yours is the control. Yours must be the request for control.

ABE. You have got to hear it yourself.

BONE. Not tonight, sir. Not tonight. Are you not a myth?

ABE. Myth is for heroes.

BONE. You are unheroic, then?

ABE. I do not define my own heroism. A state does—a nation—

BONE. Then let it—let it—

ABE. I do not understand.

BONE. A myth never understands. Only men understand myths.

ABE. I repudiate the role.

BONE. Do you?

ABE. Yes—yes—

BONE. How can you repudiate your assumption of the role of your own myth when I must now inform you that, after I kill you, the entire South will stoop to slobber over its sloth—that after your death you must understand that your own death castrated the South

—so that each nation have its unspeakable sin—that your death creates that castration and the unspeakability of that sin—that your death gives the entire nation its essential corruption, that each sovereign nation must hold within itself—that your death gives this country its maturity—its paradise and its putrescence—a nation like a man is only mature after it provokes its paradoxes of destruction and creation and is not stupefied by them.

ABE. I cannot hear you—I cannot hear you—I must hear you—I must—

(The sound of the trainwhistle is approaching a crescendo.)

BONE *(roaring above the sound)*. Do you wish me to show you the castration of the South? Let me show you, President of the United States—let me show you, Abe Gray—

ABE *(screaming)*. No—no—

BONE. I have decided—

ABE *(bellowing)*. Assassinate! For my country—for my eyes—I have made myself too much a man—and I must pay with my myth—assassinate!

(The trainwhistle is now at a climax of shriek. BONE steps back two paces and fires at ABE's head. The sound is obliterated by the whistle. We see only a blinding flash, so blinding that for a moment we cannot look at the stage. Then, we see ABE clutching at his head, blood streaming down. He falters. His lips move, he tries to make a sound, he cannot. But he manages to stagger over to BONE. The trainwhistle suddenly stops. There is absolute silence. He clutches at BONE's clothes: he would rip them off. He tries.)

ABE *(groaning)*. Liar—let me see—ah—liar—

(He manages to take hold of BONE's shirt and rip it down to the waist, and falls with the piece to the ground.)

ABE. I can see—I can—

(ABE GRAY dies. CHRISTINE ENTERS as BONE stares down at the body.)

CHRISTINE. Is it so, brother?

BONE. I have never dared to determine.

(She leads BONE slowly OFFSTAGE as the remote sound of the trainwhistle is heard for a long, sustained note as:

(THE CURTAIN FALLS.)



VIEW

death
your
a sov-
s this
n like
action

you—

(o.)
w you
of the

eyes—
th my

s back
by the
oment
head,
make
e. The
utches

own to

own at

und of

Editorial Notes

(continued from inside front cover)

no foundation support, no angels, no bank account, no endowment (and \$5,000 seemed much greater in 1934 than it does in 1959, as, indeed, it was), but its founders had the faith and the urge.

The press was not always helpful. A famous columnist commented editorially: "Our forecast is that nothing will come of it!" Well, something did come of it, and that something should today give all Americans pride and joy. Poets and writers, including Louis Ledoux, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and later Robert Frost rallied to the Cause. Distinguished persons in professional, business and public life, including three Andersons (Judith, Marion, and Maxwell), Mrs. Dwight Eisenhower, Oscar Hammerstein II, Jascha Heifetz, Herbert Hoover, Fritz Kreisler, General George C. Marshall, Mrs. Harry Truman, Owen D. Young, and a host of others, constituting a miniature *Who's Who*, joined in as financial sponsors. The late Mrs. Thomas W. Lamont's \$100,000 bequest in 1953 for fellowships and for the "discovery and encouragement of new poetic genius" made possible, among other good deeds, the Academy's competitions for the publications of volumes of poetry (four young poets—Constance Carrier, Donald Hall, Philip Booth, Daniel Berrigen, S. J.—have been published to date). Mary Cummings Eudy's 1954 bequest of \$5,000 and a subsequent anonymous gift of another \$5,000 provided for annual \$100 poetry prizes at twenty colleges and universities. The Columbia Broadcasting System enabled the Academy to sponsor its national radio verse play contest involving substantial prizes. The judges in 1957 were Maxwell

Anderson, Brooks Atkinson, and Thornton Wilder.

Perhaps the Academy's most useful single service to poetry as of now is its \$5,000 Fellowships, which have been awarded as follows:

Edwin Markham	1937
Edgar Lee Masters	1946
Ridgely Torrence	1947
Percy MacKaye	1948
E. E. Cummings	1950
Padraic Colum	1952
Robert Frost	1953
Louise Townsend Nicholl	1954
Oliver St. John Gogarty	1954
Rolfe Humphries	1955
William Carlos Williams	1956
Conrad Aiken	1957
Robinson Jeffers	1958

The award to Edwin Markham undoubtedly made the last difficult years of his life easier; the one to Edgar Lee Masters was not unwelcome to the author of one of America's greatest books, *The Spoon River Anthology*; the one to Robert Frost came at a time when he could be helped; the one to E. E. Cummings evoked the response, "I didn't know so many people cared"—and all came at a time when America's poets, America's poetry, and America's lovers of poetry needed the "lift" the Fellowships inspire.

The Literary Review (one year old) wishes its co-worker in the vineyard, *The Academy of American Poets* (twenty-five years old), many more anniversaries of high endeavor on behalf of poets and poetry: poetry on the air and TV, poetry lectures, poetry dramas, poetry readings, poetry taught properly—above all, poetry in the hearts of Americans everywhere.

The

Literary

Review

AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY PUBLISHED BY

Fairleigh Dickinson University

TEANECK, NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA